This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

The Tiger's Coat

By Elizabeth Dejeans

SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
LVX
FIAT
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

761
D326
t

SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
LVX
FIAT
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

761
D326
t

THE TIGER'S COAT

SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
LVX
FIAT
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

761
D326
t

THE TIGER'S COAT

Digitized by Google

"I came to you in a storm—do you remember?"

THE TIGER'S COAT

By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

Author of

The House of Doom
The Life Builders, etc.

With Illustrations by

ARTHUR I. KELLER

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

remember."

THE TIGER'S COAT

By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

Author of

The House of Thane
The Life Builders, etc.

With Illustrations by

ARTHUR I. KELLER

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT 1917
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A Disguise	1
II	Two Financiers—and a Stray	7
III	MacAllister Questions	19
IV	Soldiers of Fortune	25
V	The House on the Hill	35
VI	Mrs. Mendall	37
VII	The Studio	42
VIII	"So Be It Then"	50
IX	The Call of the Primitive	58
X	Marie Ogilvie	60
XI	"A Kinswoman of Mine"	65
XII	A Medieval Mystery	69
XIII	Crossed Swords	73
XIV	Getting Away from Boredom	82
XV	Surmises	88
XVI	The Hint of the Dusky	91
XVII	The Wildcat and the Panther	98
XVIII	"But I Please You?"	108
XIX	A Cataclysm	114
XX	"What's Done Is Done"	120
XXI	A Wife at Fault	131
XXII	Mendall Gains a Model	135
XXIII	An Unexpected Visitor	144
XXIV	Marie Scores	150
XXV	Unease	155
XXVI	MacAllister Gets His Way	162
XXVII	An Unconventional Procedure	172
XXVIII	The Questionable Woman	181
XXIX	A Bit of Bad News	188
XXX	Mrs. Mendall Acts	199
XXXI	An Ultimatum	207
XXXII	A Decision	213

M18196

CONTENTS—Continued

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXXIII	Marie Charms Laclasse	217
XXXIV	The Game of Defiance	226
XXXV	A Delilah on Canvas	235
XXXVI	Very Naturally a Woman	241
XXXVII	The Costume Dance	250
XXXVIII	"You Know Me Not at All"	257
XXXIX	La De La Guarda	264
XL	They None of Them Spoke	272
XLI	Mrs. Mendall Tells a Secret	276
XLII	Storm Clouds	286
XLIII	Beneath the Tiger's Coat	291
XLIV	And With Her Went Inspiration	301
XLV	The Meeting	304
XLVI	"Just Love"	309
XLVII	The Truth Lay Between Them	322
XLVIII	The Battle	328
XLIX	A Silent House	338
L	The Yellow Streak	340
LI	"I'll Send for Her Then"	351
LII	An Advanced Woman	354
LIII	Mendall Follows	361
LIV	A Possibility	366
LV	A Race with the Wind	376
LVI	Suspense	385
LVII	What Did He Mean to Do?	393
LVIII	The Show City	404
LIX	"If Ye'll Only Have It So"	409
LX	Just All Woman	419

THE TIGER'S COAT

THE TIGER'S COAT

I

A DISGUISE

THE flaring, wavering light turned the foggy dimness of the room into golden indecision.

Some bygone tenant, possibly the first French landlord of the old house—a residence before the wharves had shut out its view of the North River—had hung the walls in yellow, an imported paper embossed with huge palm leaves and roses. In some following evacuation and retenanting the heavy Victorian furniture had disappeared and been replaced by flimsy golden oak of Grand Rapids make which had been battered by hard usage into early decrepitude; the worn flooring was covered with dull yellow oilcloth; the Venetian blinds had been removed and the windows curtained with shades on patent rollers, yellow shades long since darkened by fog and smoke to the prevailing dull gold tint.

All was dingily golden, even the girl who sat beside a small huddle of belongings unwrapped from an old yellow and black Mexican blanket which she had drawn

to the spot where the light from the gas-jet fell strongest. The mass of crisply tangled hair which was piled on her head showed threads of gold, black hair shot with gold. Her black brows and lashes also more than hinted of bronze. The pallor of her thin face and arms, thin almost to emaciation, had the same jaundiced tint.

With unskilful fingers she was laboriously hemming a frayed skirt, a hem awkwardly turned, which shortened the skirt by six inches, the meagerness of the huddled heap at her side and the blanket that wrapped her against the April chill eloquently suggesting that she was tampering with the only street garment she possessed.

She worked steadily and painfully, coughing now and then, sounds she tried to smother, for it was the stillest hour of the night. The midnight traffic was over and the early trucking to the wharves not yet begun, so every sound was harshly defined. The river noises were distinct, an occasional whining siren, some small river craft nosing its way along through the fog. At long intervals the whir of a Twenty-third Street car, two blocks away, dominated the never entirely deadened growl of New York.

When her task was over, the girl rose quickly and with a swift stealthy energy, quite at variance with the awkwardness with which she had handled scissors and needle, she jerked the blanket from her shoulders and flinging it upon the tousled folding bed, closed the bed. The only mirror the room contained was framed

in the bed; in it she could survey the thing she had done.

She put the skirt on over her rough cotton chemise and short petticoat, then with frowning brows studied intently the abbreviated skirt. It scarcely reached to her shoetops, clumsy shoes with heavy soles, certainly sizes too large for her feet, if they were as slimly proportioned as her hands. She scowled at the shoes, and at her shortened skirt, and up at the blinking gas-jet, a look of scorn and disgust to which her amber glance gave a touch of animal ferocity, for the gold that in hair and brows and skin was a commingling, showed unalloyed in her eyes; her eyes were frankly yellow.

She gazed at her reflection, and her full lip curled. "Refugee," she said softly, in Italian, and played with the word, repeating it in Spanish, *"Refugiada."* Then glancing down at her short skirt her lip quivered and bent in a smile. *"Pauvre petite,"* she murmured in perfectly enunciated French, and began to laugh softly, a shaking of her thin shoulders that brought on an agonized fit of coughing which she smothered by dropping to the floor and burying her face in the folds of the skirt that had aroused her laughter.

The paroxysm shook and twisted her slight body, bent and tortured it. It took her a long time to get her breath after the attack of strangling, but when she recovered, though weak and panting from exhaustion, the sardonic spirit within her was still undaunted, for she exclaimed, in correct though softly accented Eng-

lish, "Devil take this abominable climate!" She seemed to feel a certain satisfaction in her repertoire of languages; she grimaced at her reflection, her narrowed eyes agleam. The thing was enacted while still sitting on the floor, collecting strength to rise.

But the interlude over, she returned to her previous swift energy. She rose and took the pins from her hair. It fell, a tangled length, reaching to her knees, crisp, rather coarse hair, which, when the light struck it, looked tawny. She combed it with quick strokes and braided it deftly into two braids, tying each with red ribbon, flaring bows such as would be worn by a miss of fifteen. From the huddle on the floor she took then a flannel blouse with a childishly wide collar, and ended by placing on her head a cheap sailor hat decorated with a red quill. She was costumed.

She studied the effect closely, twisting about to do so, displaying a feline grace that suggested maturity, as did the sleepy intelligence of her long heavily-lashed eyes. Yet in figure she looked a very young girl; she was not really tall, her appearance of height being the result of long lines; and she was so extremely thin. Most observers would decide that she had the look of maturity which illness sometimes stamps on the face of a child; the decent poverty of her attire gave her an air of pathos.

"Bon!" she whispered, with a look of satisfaction.

Then, suddenly, her face changed. Her eyes narrowed to mere slits, her head dropped, her features became immobile, every atom of her given to listening.

She turned and, without apparent purpose, moved well beyond the range of vision commanded by the keyhole. Then with infinite caution she sank to the floor and lay with head bent to it, listening. Then, as noiselessly, she began to creep toward the door, pausing at intervals, until she brought up with ear to the crack beneath it. The first truck on its way to the wharves rumbled along through the street with a clatter of heavy hoofs sufficient to deaden any light sound, but she relaxed not a muscle. . . . Suddenly she lifted, and dropping back on her haunches, threw back her head and laughed, silent laughter that shook her.

She rose then, grown immobile again, and careful of every sound, as she had been from the beginning, she removed the chair that, braced beneath the door-knob, had served instead of a lock, and softly opened to the breathing thing whose presence she had sensed. It was a cat, tawny and thin almost as a shadow, arching its back against the door-jamb.

Yellow eyes looked into yellow eyes, and the cat lifted a pale lip in a soundless mew. Then at a regal motion of the girl's the yellow shadow slipped in, and with the same noiseless caution the girl rebarricaded the door.

She came back to the loosened bundle on the floor and, quite oblivious of her companion, went on swiftly with her preparations. She folded into small compass her few articles of clothing, her attention given chiefly to a package of letters, and a roll of drawings. The latter she handled thoughtfully. Evidently it occurred

to her to destroy them, for she looked about the room, at the cold stove and the cracked slop-bowl—and decided against destruction. She put the roll of drawings, together with the letters, under the folded clothing, but first she singled out from the letters one which she placed in the bosom of her dress.

Wrapping her little pile of belongings in the blanket, she tied it up with the rope that evidently had previously served the purpose. Hatted, clothed for her journey, she sat down then in immigrant fashion on her bundle, a crouching figure, apparently half woman, half child, hollow-cheeked and jaundiced by privation or fever, possibly a fleck of the war-scum of 1915 that had been borne across the Atlantic and tossed upon a neutral shore. With eyes narrowed and brilliant, but with features as immobile as an Indian's or a stolid peasant's transported westward into a far country, she watched for the first sign of day.

And the tawny cat, starveling wanderer of grimy pavements and dank back yards, arched its spine against her knee, twisted and turned against it, purring between pale lips.

II

TWO FINANCIERS—AND A STRAY

ON a spring evening, in the year 1915, in a new residence in a thriving middle-western town that its next census will declare to be a city of two hundred thousand souls, two men sat over their after-dinner coffee. They were perhaps the two most prominent citizens of Laclasse: Alexander MacAllister, millionaire manufacturer and landowner, and Frederick Bagsby, president of the Laclasse National Bank.

They were sitting in MacAllister's library, before a bright wood fire which was an offset to the dampness, laden with the smell of fresh earth and young grass, blown in from the French windows at the end of the long room. For an April rain was falling, a steady patter on the tiling of the porch.

They had dined well, and with the evening paper's budget of war news at their elbows, had talked of the European situation. "I told ye in the beginning, there'd be no near end to it," had been MacAllister's concluding remark.

"You certainly have banked on a long continuance of the war," Bagsby replied.

MacAllister gave him his shrewd glance. "I've

not gone entirely on guesswork, Fred. I didn't go to Paris and London last fall for nothing. I had a couple of hard and fast contracts back of me and the certainty of more to come, before ever I decided to turn my iron works into a munition plant." He lowered his voice. "There was a three-hundred-thousand-dollar order came in to-day; I've more work ahead for the plant than it can get through in a year. By the second week in May we'll be in full blast."

"I don't want to criticize you, Mac; any one who wants to manufacture the materials to kill may, but I shouldn't want to do it," Bagsby said.

"But ye'd gladly furnish the money to buy ammunition," MacAllister retorted dryly. "Ye'd be as keen over an international loan as any banker in the country."

Bagsby studied him a moment, his usually kindly face grown grave. "Not I!" he said with decision. "It's my business to loan money, I know, just as it's your business to manufacture; but I loan my money as I see fit. I'd loan it in a minute to prevent war, and it's my belief that, after we've learned our ugly lesson, money will be the force that will prevent war. If the world had been a little more on the alert and less held by its traditions, I believe that monetary force, wisely applied, might have averted this barbaric waste of life. . . . But to turn bloodshed to a cash account! . . . I've told you before, Mac—I don't stand with you on this enterprise of yours, and the best sense of the community is with me. I think that the feeling

here is that this whole munition question is the one which is most likely to embroil us—that it's a menace to the neutrality we're all anxious to preserve. You've already aroused a labor agitation that we don't want here in Laclasse; you've always employed a big force of Austrians as well as Italians in your iron works, and your present arrangement discounts the Austrian and favors the Italian. It's a necessary precautionary measure, I suppose; but it's aroused feeling among the laboring class. Laclasse hasn't wanted your plant, Mac, and you don't need the money it'll bring you."

MacAllister's heavy brows lowered. "Andrew Kraup hasn't wanted my plant, you mean," MacAllister retorted. "Now that he's done nosing about to see if he couldn't make trouble for me over the location of my plant and my right of way to the railroad, perhaps there'll be peace in Laclasse. I'm quite able to cope with a few disaffected Austrian laborers. I stand on my rights, and on precedent. Ye have a right to yer views, and I to mine, and Kraup to his, but neither he nor any other man shall stop my manufacturing ammunition for my friends. Don't ye forget that I'm barely one generation an American, Fred."

"Well, well—we've gone over the subject before and got nowhere," Bagsby said, with a return to his usual genial manner. "Both you and Kraup are good American citizens; either of you'd flare at the man who'd intimate that you weren't. You two are out and out the biggest real-estate owners here. You've done more to develop the town than any other two men, and

always with the best interests of the town in mind, and yet you're both of you illustrations of 'Blood's thicker than water.' "

"With the important difference that I'm nobody's spy."

Bagsby looked across at his host, inwardly much amused. The feud between Alexander MacAllister and Andrew Kraup was of long standing. They had been business antagonists for years. They had fought over land deals in the early days, and each on occasion had "done" the other. It had always been steel against steel with those two, Kraup's bulk pitted against MacAllister's hard muscle. MacAllister was a manufacturer of home products, and Kraup was at the head of the largest middle-western firm importing German goods; they were continually clashing over their respective interests. The war had dealt Kraup's firm a blow, and MacAllister was profiting by conditions that were adverse to Kraup's interests, both his business and his family interests, for Kraup had a large family connection in Germany with which the war was playing havoc. Kraup had reason to feel bitter toward his triumphant rival, and yet MacAllister's prejudices did not stir in the least Bagsby's belief in Andrew Kraup's integrity; Bagsby's bank had done business with Andrew Kraup for some twenty years or more—before ever Bagsby inherited his father's place as head of the bank.

And Bagsby was also quite as well acquainted with MacAllister, with both his good qualities and his un-

amiable traits. Both Kraup and MacAllister were born fighters—that was the trouble. Bagsby was a small rotund man, and, as a rule, genial and kindly. He studied with a touch of envy MacAllister's fair height, rugged head and general appearance of big-boned spareness. The smileless look of the man was in keeping with the dryness of his voice, the sunburned dryness of his skin, and the hardness of the hand that held in its hollow a smoke-blackened pipe. And yet he gave the impression of abounding force and a certain youthful virility. He looked all of forty-four, yet when overtaken by amusement laughed like a boy of twenty. He had a well-developed, though a somewhat sardonic, sense of humor.

If there was amusement beneath MacAllister's next remark, his aspect did not show it. He broke the moment's silence abruptly. "We'll let my plant be—what's all this talk about my getting married?"

Bagsby shifted uneasily in his seat, for on this count he felt guilty. MacAllister had a way of jumping from one subject to another that was discomposing at times.

"A house of twenty rooms, Mac, and you a bachelor," he protested. "Isn't that enough to set every woman's tongue in the city wagging?"

"And how about the male tongues of this gossipless place?" MacAllister persisted. "It struck me, when I came a bit unexpectedly on yer group of three to-day at the club, that I heard my name mentioned in connection with matrimony. By all rights you and Kraup

and Harmon Kent ought to've been discussing the commercial welfare of this town. Possibly ye were just filling in time till I appeared, arranging the private affairs of some of us who've been lucky enough to escape the noose the rest of ye've run yer heads into? Who have the lot of ye picked for me now? I'm interested to hear."

Bagsby felt thoroughly uncomfortable. He knew more about MacAllister's bachelor laxities than most men did. MacAllister was, as Bagsby would have expressed it, "a very human sort." But this matter he had broached was somewhat out of the ordinary. Bagsby felt that he was going to be flayed, and it was all Kraup's fault—and MacAllister's for having challenged gossip. A man and woman couldn't defy public opinion, as MacAllister and Freda O'Rourke had, and not be discussed; particularly when MacAllister had built a house that looked like a plain bid for matrimony.

MacAllister must know that he had always been gossiped about. He had always kept his own counsel and done as he pleased—two things the public will not forgive. He had begun by running away from Laclasse when he was fifteen. He had been first a cowboy in Texas, and then a miner in Mexico. He had returned fifteen years later, when both his father and his stepmother were dead, when Laclasse was experiencing its first substantial boom. He had some money then, how much or how little no one but MacAllister knew; it was supposed he had cleaned up a comfortable sum in

Mexican mines. He had invested first in real estate, and then started his bag factory; there were millions of bushels of Nebraska wheat to be sacked. From that on, he had climbed steadily up the ladder of success. Later, he had established his iron works. In 1910 he was one of the richest men in Laclasse, and in 1915 he was granted to be one of the wealthiest men in all Nebraska.

He had not married. When Laclasse began to advertise its prosperity by building beautiful homes, MacAllister did not build. For six years he had occupied the upper floor of the old O'Rourke house, living still in his usual unconventional fashion. Nevertheless, his close friendship with Freda O'Rourke had apparently remained unbroken; he had never hesitated to show himself in public with her—to the continual edification of the scandal-lovers. Laclasse had decided that a man with MacAllister's attitude to marriage was not likely to burden himself with an establishment, so even when he had financed the Dunkirk Division Association which was now luring the socially ambitious Country Clubwards into suburban exclusiveness, no one had thought that he would join the exodus. Even when it was known that MacAllister had reserved an entire block for himself, no one suspected.

But the thing had happened. MacAllister had built himself a palatial house that outwardly had the severe dignity of a beautifully designed institution. It had a big upper hall that might be meant for either a ballroom or an art gallery. Laclasse had decided that it

must portend a matrimonial venture of some sort. Was he thinking of marrying Freda O'Rourke? In justice to her he ought to marry her; their intimacy had been town talk for years. But men rarely did such chivalrous things. He was far more likely to marry some girl who was an entire stranger to Laclasse. Some Scotch girl, possibly; his father had been a Scotchman, and MacAllister was intensely proud of his Scotch descent. He even clung determinedly to his Scotch accent.

Bagsby knew that this sort of talk had enlivened every drawing-room in Laclasse for months. But it would be decidedly awkward if MacAllister had overheard all that had been said at the club that afternoon. Some of the references to Freda O'Rourke had been broad. He hoped that MacAllister had caught only Kraup's final remark: "I bet you ten to one MacAllister's orphan asylum will haf a mistress before the year is gone."

"Just women's talk, Mac," Bagsby maintained stoutly. "It's the house has done it. No bachelor could build a house like this and not set the town talking."

"And I suppose ye'd advise me to marry in self-defense?" MacAllister asked in the same smileless way.

"Why shouldn't you marry?" Bagsby argued. "You're just forty-four—if you're ever going to marry, now's the time."

Bagsby was eager to lead off into a discussion; MacAllister was bitter sometimes about marriage.

But MacAllister was not to be drawn. "This town likes to talk," he continued. "Possibly I'll give it cause."

So it was Freda O'Rourke after all! "You do mean to marry, then?" Bagsby asked with interest.

MacAllister laughed out like one who has restrained amusement as long as he could. "Lord! The world's marrying mad! Marry! *No!* What do ye take me for? . . . We're old friends, though, Fred, so I'll say a word in yer ear: I'm more like to adopt a daughter and keep my freedom. Ye see, I've got to think of some one to leave all this to," and he pointed to the vista of galleried hall.

Bagsby did not know what to make of that bit of confidence. He judged that MacAllister was joking. Still there was never any telling, for MacAllister's joking often covered seriousness, and his seriousness as often as not was a cloak to amusement. It was useless to question. "Is that so—" he remarked uncertainly.

"I'm a deal more likely to endow somebody else's child than beget one of my own," MacAllister continued, with a return to entire gravity. "Ye know well enough what I think of marriage, Fred—the idea of yer lending yer ear to such talk!" Then he shrugged. "But I didn't bring ye out here to convince ye that Kraup's going to lose his bet. I don't give a Deil's sixpence for the town talk—let it talk. . . . Fred, ye know a good picture when ye see it, and ye've just seen that big empty hall up above—I'm thinking of

going in for art. I'm going to fill that place with pictures."

Bagsby smothered a spasm of laughter with difficulty. MacAllister go in for art! . . . So this was the reason he had been captured at the club and brought out to see MacAllister's new house!

Bagsby really did know something about art. He had inherited his fortune; his father had established the first banking firm in Nebraska. It was one of the funny stories of the town, his having run away from college and gone to New York, intent on being an artist; and how he had been brought back to Laclasse by his father and set to work in the bank. By an unusual chance Frederick Bagsby turned out something of a financier, but he never lost his love of art. He was president of the Art Exhibition League. He had allowed himself to be elected to the public school board because he had art instruction in the Laclasse schools at heart. It was he who had urged the school board to increase the art teacher's salary so Carl Mendall could be brought from the East. It was his love of beauty that had married him to the present Mrs. Bagsby—she had an astonishingly beautiful profile.

But MacAllister and art! MacAllister knew no more about art than his English butler—less, probably, for Townley appeared to have spent most of his life abroad.

It was the butler who, fortunately, at this moment diverted MacAllister's attention. He had opened the

front door to a caller, and was engaged in an altercation.

"Who can it be in this rain?" MacAllister said, puzzled.

It was a girl who had entered, and now stood in full view while Townley came to announce her. They could see her as she waited, an ill-dressed girl, tall and thin. Bagsby had only a glimpse of her face, for when she saw him, she averted it. He received a general impression, however: cheeks sallow and hollowed, a mouth that in contrast appeared full-lipped, and eyes which in the shadow of her hat looked queerly wide apart. From the look of her sagging, clinging garments, she must be dripping pools of water on MacAllister's beautiful hall floor. Still, she did not look a beggar. Some Italian from the packing district, or from MacAllister's iron works?

But Townley had better sense than to admit such at the front door. He was an intelligent man who acted both as MacAllister's chauffeur and his butler. MacAllister kept only men servants; his cook was a Chinaman. Curious that a girl should come at ten o'clock at night to a house that contained only men. Some misstep of MacAllister's come to confront him? But the girl had the appearance of almost a child; her two sopping braids of hair hung to her knees.

MacAllister was staring at her; then his eyes questioned the butler.

Townley was a clean-shaven, erect man. Just now

he looked more erect than usual. His blond face was flushed, for the altercation at the door had been brief and sharp. "A—young person—who insists she must see you, sir. She presents this, sir," he announced, with a mien haughty enough for a stage butler.

MacAllister took the envelope and hastily drew out a folded sheet. It had an extraordinary effect on him: he stared at it like one looking upon a ghost, then was out of his chair and in the hall before Bagsby realized what he was about. Then he saw the meeting: MacAllister halted before the girl, and Bagsby heard an indistinct exclamation, a momentary pause before he offered his hand. He talked then, her hand in his, a low-voiced conversation that did not penetrate into the library. Bagsby wished that MacAllister's substantial body did not hide the girl.

He did not bring her into the library; he led her, presently, to the stairs, his arm about her shoulders, and as he turned, Bagsby saw his face. It wore a curious expression, startled certainly, but that was not all; Bagsby could not define just what MacAllister's lifted brows and parted lips did mean—it was not an expression he had ever seen on Alexander MacAllister's face before.

They passed on, up the stairs, and when Bagsby turned to the butler, he found that he had only his very active curiosity as companion, for Townley had disappeared.

III

MAC ALLISTER QUESTIONS

IT WAS fully half an hour before MacAllister returned. As he came in, Bagsby noticed that he glanced over his shoulder in the direction of the hall, to make sure, probably, that from where he sat Bagsby must have seen the meeting. He looked as usual now, his sandy brows pent, his lips shut in a straight line.

He offered no explanation. "I'm sorry we were interrupted," was all he said. "What's become of Townley? Hasn't he been looking after ye?" He rang peremptorily. "Yer forgetting yer duties," he said sharply when the man appeared. "Ye know better than that."

Townley may have gathered from MacAllister's manner that he had been guilty of a graver mistake than the neglect of Mr. Bagsby; possibly sundry orders hurtled from up-stairs had convinced the butler that he had admitted an angel unawares; at any rate the celerity with which he was served amused Bagsby. Townley created quite a stir with whisky and seltzer and the proffer of cigars. The man was clever; he was seconding MacAllister's wish for a diversion; it helped to bridge the interval during which MacAllister knew his guest must have been doing some thinking.

MacAllister evidently meant to make no explanation, for as soon as he was settled in his chair he took up the subject which had been dropped when the girl entered. "I was in earnest when I said I meant to fill that gallery of mine up-stairs," he said. "What sort of work does Mendall do, Fred?"

"Who—Carl Mendall? . . . He paints—well." There was hesitation in Bagsby's manner. He was taken aback by MacAllister's unexpected mention of the artist.

"He teaches, doesn't he?"

Bagsby's manner was a trifle curt: "He teaches in the public schools—I thought every one knew that."

"It's private lessons I mean? I thought yer daughter was taking of him?"

"Yes, Clare took of him for a time."

"Just where does he live, Fred?"

Bagsby wondered what Mendall's teaching or his residence had to do with stocking MacAllister's gallery. He had grown red; any mention of Carl Mendall made him uncomfortable, but he did not want to show it. "He lives out Bellevue way. They bought an acre or two from Judge Camp and built."

"Judge Camp? Their house must be just below Twin Oaks Hill, then! It can't be more than a mile and a half southeast of the plant. . . . Did ye ever buy any of Mendall's paintings, Fred?"

"Yes, one—when he first came here."

"His wife's a nice woman, isn't she—well educated and domestic?"

Bagsby felt like asking MacAllister what he was "driving at." If MacAllister had been questioning about any one else, he would have asked. "So I've heard," he answered steadily.

"And well bred?" MacAllister persisted.

The banker looked as grave as he did in business hours. "I believe so. She's a New Englander. . . . So is Mendall."

"Mendall a New Englander! He looks more like a handsome gipsy; the kind of man women usually make fools of themselves over. . . . I do remember now that he talks like an Englishman gone wrong—broad '*a*'s' and all that. . . . Have they any children?"

"I believe not," Bagsby returned. He shifted uneasily. If there was beginning to be gossip about his daughter and Mendall, and it had been his hourly fear that there would be, MacAllister was taking a sardonic way of acquainting him with it. MacAllister had an abominable way with him sometimes; he had always had—even when a boy. He was keenly and accurately observant, and cool as the devil. The man who incurred his displeasure might expect to be prodded unmercifully. It was one reason why he was feared more than he was liked. He had some traits that were exasperating.

"They are poor, of course?" MacAllister continued.

"Would any artist stay five minutes in Laclasse if he had money to get out?" Bagsby retorted, giving way a little to his feelings. "They say he has a houseful

of paintings he can't sell. Why don't you buy them for your gallery and give him the loose change he needs to take himself off to Paris!"

If MacAllister knew the real reason for Bagsby's heat, he did not show it. "That's not a bad idea," he said thoughtfully. "And particularly so as Paris is out of the question for a year or so." Then he showed his teeth in the sudden smile which occasionally overtook him. "I'm much obliged to ye, Fred. Ye've told me several things I've wanted to know."

"I'll go, then," Bagsby returned, endeavoring to be natural. "It's getting late."

"I'll have Townley get out the limousine, and meantime have a bit more Scotch," MacAllister urged. He looked pleased, a somewhat rare expression with him.

Bagsby emptied his glass mechanically. He was thoroughly upset by the suspicion that MacAllister had been punishing him for sitting quietly by while MacAllister's private affairs were being discussed. If he was meaning to tell him that his, Bagsby's, glass house was also being stoned, he was taking a roundabout way of doing it; but that was like MacAllister.

He felt hotly sure that it was MacAllister's purpose, when a few minutes later they stood in the vestibule, and MacAllister said abruptly: "Fred, I believe it's a deal more complicated thing, rearing a girl—than a boy. Don't ye? . . . A girl can be tarnished so easy. Dirt has a way of sticking to a woman. . . . And say what ye will, this place is rapid. It's a funny combination of Puritanism and looseness. Perhaps

it's just that the town's not large enough yet for things to be done sub rosa, so they're evident."

"Oh, I don't know; we're free and easy, but I don't believe we're unwholesome," Bagsby objected, conscious meantime that the palms of his hands had grown damp. It was one thing, listening to comments on Freda O'Rourke, and quite another, the realization that the same sort of comment might be hovering over his own household.

As Townley swept him cityward, Bagsby reflected that MacAllister showed his good sense in keeping out of marriage. His own venture was not proving satisfactory. He had married too young a woman, and that was what a man who had money and was well along in life was apt to do. He had forgotten Clare when he married. Blanche was not the best guide for his daughter. She was not experienced enough, and too critically aloof herself, to realize that it might be dangerous for an independently inclined girl like Clare to be thrown too much with a fascinating man like Carl Mendall. Blanche was too assured and too much given to enthusiasm.

Bagsby had disapproved of his wife's having her portrait painted by Mendall. When he had remonstrated there had been a scene: he was told that Laclasse was absolutely barren of intellectual pleasures; that she had the advancement of art in Laclasse quite as much at heart as he had; that Carl Mendall was certainly a genius; he was poor and struggling, and painting her portrait would bring him other commissions.

And now, just because of some foolish idea about Clare, he wanted her to drop the artist. It was an utterly unnecessary cruelty!

Bagsby had succumbed, but he had not ceased to be uneasy. He had not spoken to Clare; it might be putting ideas into her head that so far had no lodgment there. Until this interest in Carl Mendall had taken hold on her and her stepmother, she had shown no particular interest in any one—unless, possibly, in young Ellis Kraup. She had never shown any liking for older men such as Harmon Kent, who, in spite of his reputation—perhaps because of it—was considered fascinating. She had always seemed so thoroughly wholesome.

For some time Bagsby had realized that he had not considered Clare sufficiently when he married. It made him highly sensitive in everything that concerned his daughter, and to-night MacAllister's enigmatic speeches fell like sparks on tinder. He decided that something must be done in this Mendall matter, but he would have to go about it carefully or there would be a deal more talk than there was.

In his perturbation Bagsby forgot, for the time being, the incident of the evening, the girl he had left in MacAllister's house.

IV

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

WHEN MacAllister's chauffeur left the Bagsbys' door it was not to return as rapidly as possible to the palatial garage which housed MacAllister's machines. He turned cityward on Broad Street, the main business thoroughfare of Laclasse. The downpour was just now so terrific that the asphalt was submerged in places. The gutters were small rivers. On his way down Broad Street he had passed only an occasional vehicle; everything had sought shelter from the storm.

When Townley reached the region of shops, he left the limousine at the curb and walked to the first drug store. He went directly to its telephone booth and called up the MacAllister house.

It was MacAllister who answered.

"I'm down in the city, sir," the chauffeur said. "A tire has gone wrong, and in this rain I thought best to run the machine down. I'll 'ave it in horder and out early in the morning, sir."

"Just the tire?" MacAllister asked.

"Just that, sir. I couldn't stop in the rain to fix it, sir."

"Of course not. Put it up for the night and fix it

in the morning. I'll run myself down in the car in the morning. It's certain to be clear—I won't want the limousine."

"Very well, sir."

Townley went out to the limousine, and turning from Broad into a side street, drove in the direction of South Laclasse.

For a long distance he went by the most traveled streets—until he had passed the stock-yard and packing district, and had crossed the Union Pacific tracks. Then he went by streets most of which were unpaved. Here, except for the lights of his car, he was in almost total darkness and splashing through mud. There were stretches of empty lots. He passed only an occasional house, or, rather, laborer's shack.

At the intersection of two streets he extinguished the lights, feeling his way along rather than driving, for a few more straggling blocks—until there loomed before him a black mass, a group of cottonwood trees cresting a bank. Here he turned into a wagon road, plowing his way through mud for a short distance, then stopped. The grove offered a black background for the machine; by no chance could it be seen from the street.

He skirted the grove and came upon the rear of a small house that faced the next street. He stood for a time, listening, with ear to the window-ledge, then rapped on the window, three raps punctuated by intervals. Some one within gave the same signal, and then the back door opened upon darkness.

The chauffeur kept his distance. *"Sémpre—"* he said softly.

"Per sémpre," was the answer.

Townley felt his way to the door, then, and though he miscalculated the step and stumbled, he gathered himself up without an exclamation. He stood in silence and pitch darkness until the door was shut and locked behind him and a gas-jet flickered into a cautious gleam, barely sufficient to distinguish objects in the room, a gas stove, a table and chairs, and the slight dark man who admitted him.

He peered at Townley's dripping figure: "You chose a safe enough night," he said in Italian.

"I seized an opportunity—I've something to tell you. . . . But, first—have you any whisky, Mortola?" He also spoke in Italian.

"Si."

"Give me some, then—and some hot water. I'm wet almost to my middle, and my leg pains me."

He sat down at the table and stretched his leg to ease it, his face twisting with pain. "Damn that Englishman's bullet!" he said, and then, with cockney fluency, cursed the entire nation.

The man he called Mortola chuckled softly as he lighted the stove and drew water for the kettle. He brought a flask from an inner room and set it and a cracked cup before the chauffeur.

"I see they have put on gas for you and turned on the water," Townley remarked next.

"I had to have both. Fortunately the gas-pipe comes

through the wall, so I have been able to put an attachment carrying it into the inner room without its being discovered from below, or from this room—best to be careful about such small things." Though he spoke with a slight accent, his English was quite as fluent as Townley's; it lacked entirely Townley's cockney twang.

"It's a good location. Just the place a dago would choose—within easy reach of the plant."

"I searched all over South Laclasse before I found it—as you know," Mortola said. "My Italian neighbors are not near enough to overlook me, and yet not so far away that I might seem to be looking for seclusion. Like myself, most of them are going to be taken on at the plant. I have made friends with them—I pass for one of their own kind, a frugal dago. I have already begun to cultivate a garden patch here, in the rear. There is my supper of macaroni, strong enough of garlic for any ditch-digger. If I should be raided, it is all they would find—traces of the Italian laborer everywhere."

"You may have to keep at it a little longer than we expected," Townley said.

His companion came close, his sallow face suddenly darkened by concern. "What has happened?" he asked quickly.

"Sit down while I tell you. See what you make of it."

They sat with their heads together, whispering in Italian. "It appears a small thing," Townley said,

"and yet it may not be. . . . To-night MacAllister had the banker, Bagsby, with him for dinner. There was the usual talk—MacAllister was bitter against Andrew Kraup—but the main thing of interest I overheard was that MacAllister has still another order—every reason for pushing work at the plant. . . . What happened was this: a little after ten o'clock the door-bell rang, and when I opened there stood a girl dripping from the rain, in poor clothes and carrying a bundle. She has a face more hollow-cheeked and sallower than yours, Mortola, and eyes light and very wide apart—a strange face. Had it not been for her strange look, I think it would instantly have occurred to me that she was a refugee."

"Ah—" Mortola said.

"But it did not—not till she had spoken. The moment I stood before her, she demanded to see MacAllister, and, Mortola, *in Italian!*"

"And you, Bersanio?"

The chauffeur showed his white teeth in a grin. "And I answered—*not in Italian,* my dear Mortola, as your alarm suggests, but in the language of the English butler who does not understand!"

"Good for you, Bersanio! . . . But what then?"

"She made her demand then in English, the English of an educated foreigner; but when I refused to admit her, declaring that my master was engaged with company, she lost all patience and flared at me in French, as if that were her most natural tongue. I, of course, did not understand French, either, and she was forced

to return to English, but her French is fluent—of that I was given sufficient proof—and certainly she glared at me as if she suspected me of some imposture."

"Um! A French girl, then?"

"She gives more the impression of a mongrel," Townley said. "Her features remind me of the South Americans one sees in Paris. If she is French, there is other blood also. . . . But, remember, I saw her only with hat dripping about her face."

"Possibly a French spy in disguise?"

"I do not think so. I managed to have a few minutes in the hall up-stairs, after he had led her up to her bedroom, and the talk was of her sufferings in Belgium. Besides, her exhaustion was too real. She looks starved and ill."

Mortola considered for a moment, then he asked, "How did he receive her?"

"She was utterly unexpected—that is certain. He looked with bewilderment upon the letter she sent in by me, and the instant it was read, leaped out of the room and hastened to her. He took her hand, they talked, and then he led her up-stairs, his arm about her. No, she was unexpected, but certainly some one he has known."

"He appeared fond, then?"

"Perhaps—he was certainly greatly concerned. The Chinaman was set to cooking for her. I took the tray, but the Chinaman took it away from me—he had been given his orders. It was evident that MacAllister was angry with me for having refused her admission."

"He treated her, then, as one would a relation?"

"Quite so."

Mortola considered again for a time; then he said: "Now tell it all to me again—give every detail."

The chauffeur's tale was substantially the same. When he had finished, Mortola shrugged. "I think there is nothing in it," he said. "I am inclined to think that she is some connection of MacAllister's who has thrown herself on his mercy. The only suspicious thing is her instantly taking you for an Italian. You say the light of the vestibule shone full on your face as you stood before her; if she is well acquainted with Italian types it is natural she should take you for an Italian. Almost any American, judging you by your features and coloring, would be satisfied that you were English; still, to one who knows the rarer type of Italian, you would suggest the Italian. Hers was an involuntary deduction. It is a little surprising that your answer was not an involuntary one also. It was a good test." He spoke with a degree of satisfaction.

"It was quite plain she had no faith in me—she may tell MacAllister that she thinks me Italian. You know how carefully I have concealed the fact from him. We thought it best that I should appear to have no sort of connection with this crowd of Italians he is taking on at the plant. I hired myself to him as an Englishman and accounted for both my father and mother; MacAllister is not one to forgive a deception."

"And who is there to gainsay you? A girl's suspicion? Poof! According to you, MacAllister has the

average man's weakness for the feminine, but there is no woman who rules him. There is no woman who has even succeeded in marrying him. . . . You have lived in London longer than anywhere else—and starved there—as I did. We owe allegiance to no country, my dear Bersanio; we are soldiers of fortune. What does it matter to us whether an American labor interest, or some other hand, feeds us? We simply utilize conditions."

"Nevertheless, Mortola, it is well to remember that MacAllister has eyes on all sides of his head. You have had proof of how carefully he is guarding his plant—not a single Austrian engaged and the record of every man he has taken on examined."

Mortola smiled. "Yes, and the unemployed Austrians hot over their exclusion. That has proved a fortunate circumstance for us. . . . No, I do not take seriously this incident that has troubled you. MacAllister is suspicious, as you say, but he is also a little pig-headed in his likes and dislikes, and he has given proofs that he trusts you. He is satisfied in his mind about you; he would simply tell her that she is mistaken. . . . But I purpose to be careful. We must find out exactly who this girl is, and why she is here. If she came from France there will be a record of her. I wish to see her, close enough to hear her voice—can that be managed?"

"Easily, if he keeps her in his house."

"But he will not do that, surely? Not even for this night—there, with only the Chinaman!"

"It is evidently what he purposes, else he would have wanted the limousine. He wanted neither me nor the machine. He is keeping her there."

"Um! That act may be of value," Mortola remarked, with the keenness of the practical intriguer. "It might be made the foundation of an unpalatable story which we could use if we saw fit. Of course, any one who knows how to go about it can have her French record looked up—that is not difficult—I can do that with ease—but not every one has our opportunity to make discoveries here. Better for you to get back to the house as soon as possible and learn what you can. . . . And, Bersanio, arrange as soon as possible that I see her. In less than three weeks I shall be employed at the plant, and I want to see her by daylight, and close. . . . To photograph her would be the thing."

"I shall watch for an opportunity, and let you know. . . . Now, is there anything else?"

"Watch MacAllister's manner to you, keenly. As long as he trusts you, your place is with him."

"I will be off, then." The chauffeur rose, catching his breath as he did so, cursing from pain. "Ah, ——. The sooner I get off these wet things the better! . . . But first show me the inner room. I should like to see how you have arranged your hiding-place."

Mortola lighted a candle. He opened a door then, and led the way into what appeared to be a small, poorly furnished bedroom. He held the candle high, and either its wavering flame or an actual smile twisted

his dark features. "You are an adept, friend Bersanio; search now, sound the floor and the walls; take your time. If your skill can make any discovery, I stand indebted to you."

V

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

MacALLISTER started out early the next morning from Laclasse. He chose to take the Bellevue car and not his automobile for his excursion into the country.

As he climbed the steep hill, on the other side of which the conductor told him he would find the Mendall house, he observed his surroundings critically. He knew that to the south, on the level, nearer the river, was the village of Bellevue, and in the intervening space there must be an occasional house, though there was not a single roof visible. Mendall had certainly succeeded in isolating himself. This was real country.

When he reached the crown of the hill, MacAllister paused to look about him. He was in a grove of oaks interspersed with tall cottonwoods. Evidently it was the Mendall house that showed now through the trees. MacAllister understood why a poor artist might choose this down-river location for a home, even though to reach it he must cross the unlovely stock-yard and packing district of South Laclasse. The growth of South Laclasse, its smokestacks, cattle-yards, and its streets

of foreign laborers' shacks had killed the possibility of this ever being a fashionable suburb.

It was a pity, for there was beauty here, a succession of hills and ravines, with glimpses on the one hand of the great, rolling Nebraska prairie, greened by corn and wheat and successive harvests of alfalfa, and on the other hand an outlook over the wide yellow curves of the Missouri, its circling arms cast about willowed islands, its yellow fingers indenting the dun-colored flats. And all viewed from leafy heights, for the hills here were for the most part heavily wooded, and the ravines a tangle of growth. The April green that now tinted even the frailest twig was promise of summer abundance. Beautiful surroundings and isolation, and not far from the city limits.

But as he came on MacAllister noted soberly the smallness and plainness of the Mendall house. It was only a story and a half, with a narrow porch crossing its front. And the little room in which the Mendalls' mulatto maid left him while she went to call her mistress was certainly unattractive. There were a few cold-looking pen-and-ink sketches on the walls, a few books, a table and some chairs; a Puritan looking place. It remained to be seen whether the mistress of the house was of the same uncompromising order.

VI

MRS. MENDALL

BUT Mrs. Mendall, when she appeared, was a distinct surprise. She was a little, shapely woman, round, firm, brown-haired and brown-browed, with a beautifully fair skin; the pink of her cheeks and lips was so evidently natural, as natural as the sky-blue of her eyes, steady eyes that took instant note of MacAllister. She was gowned as MacAllister thought any busy housewife should be at ten o'clock in the morning, in a neat cotton dress, white apron, and crowning the entire effect, a white cap. With its knot of blue ribbon it was a coquettish adjunct, and vastly becoming, MacAllister thought. He liked her type; she suggested the attractively maternal.

Her eyes widened when she saw him, and MacAllister knew instantly that she recognized him; probably she had seen him in Laclasse; he was very certain he had never seen her before.

"Mrs. Mendall, ye probably know this is Mr. MacAllister from Laclasse," he said, "and I'd best begin by asking pardon for troubling ye at this hour in the morning."

"It is no trouble, Mr. MacAllister. We are early risers in the country."

MacAllister received an instant impression of refinement. Her voice was sweet. Like her husband, she sounded her vowels broadly; to western ears her speech appeared a little affected.

"Then I'm forgiven. I'm an incurably early riser myself. . . . Mrs. Mendall, I've been told your husband has some paintings he'll sell—is that so?"

At the first sight of him the pink in her cheeks had deepened; he detected now the slight catch in her breath: "Yes—"

"A number of them?"

"There are several," she said guardedly.

MacAllister knew more about Carl Mendall than he had chosen to impart to Frederick Bagsby the evening before. He knew that the artist was utterly unbusinesslike. In that one sentence of Mrs. Mendall's he learned both that she was anxious to sell, and that she stood guard over her impractical young husband. He guessed also that she found it no easy undertaking.

"I'm looking for paintings—for my new house," MacAllister said. "I need a number; could I see what Mr. Mendall has?"

She hesitated. "Mr. Mendall is not here this morning—he is in Laclasse. Still—perhaps I could show them to you."

MacAllister knew perfectly well that Mendall would be at the schools; he had purposely chosen the morning. "If ye will be so kind." MacAllister's slight Scotch accent became more marked when he talked to a woman. "If Mr. MacAllister ever makes love—

which I very much doubt," Clare Bagsby had once remarked, "it certainly is in broad Scotch."

Mrs. Mendall smiled reservedly. "Some of them are in the studio—if you will come with me—"

She led the way into the hall, to a door that evidently opened into a room at the rear of the house. But there she paused, her finger to her lips, like a child considering, MacAllister thought. "Perhaps we had better go down to the living-room first; the landscapes are there," and she turned to the stairway, wide easy steps that led to the basement.

But it was not in any sense a basement room into which they came. It was a charming place, a long room, evidently living-room and dining-room combined, with French windows opening upon a terrace. MacAllister now saw that the house had an extra story in the rear. The hillside sloped so steeply into the ravine below that the house literally clung to the terrace for support. Beyond the ravine meadow-land lifted till it touched the crown of the hill opposite. Against the sky-line were the twin oaks which gave the hill its name. Twin Oaks Hill was the highest point in all the surrounding country.

"Who'd think it!" MacAllister exclaimed. "It's a beautiful place ye have here."

Mrs. Mendall looked pleased. "We turn a modest face to our callers."

"Ye do that! And what's above this, then?"

"My husband's studio, our bedroom, and the little room in which you were."

"And clear up?"

"There are three bedrooms up there. The large room in the back has a wonderful view of the hills and the river."

MacAllister made a mental note of the room with the view. "Ye surprise me. It's quite a house."

"These are some of Mr. Mendall's paintings," Mrs. Mendall suggested.

The wall above the paneling was hung with them. MacAllister saw that they were most of them desert scenes. He knew the desert well. Some were of the jungle, vividly suggestive of steaming heat. There was one of the Seine with the moon hung above Notre Dame.

If Mendall's work was crude, MacAllister did not detect it. He felt its power, and sensed the mastery of color. He walked the length of the room several times, his hands in his pockets, examining each painting in turn. "They're *g-r-e-a-t,*" he said finally, with slow emphasis on the word. His admiration was genuine enough.

Mrs. Mendall had paled a little as she watched him. The sale of those paintings meant so much to her; so very much. And she was intensely interested in her caller. She remembered him well—in spite of the changes twenty years had made. He was heavier, not fat, he was too ruggedly built for that; he was simply more solidly muscled. His irregular-featured face, with its pronounced nose, high cheek-bones and heavy sandy brows, was lined; there were folds about his

large tight-lipped mouth. His eyes were sandy, like his hair, like his brows. But he had lost his fair tinting; as if years of desert wind and sun had dried and tanned his skin to an ineradicable brown.

"This is Mexican desert he's painted," he remarked. "I know it well. What's the jungle?"

"That is Mexican also."

"Not the hot lands?"

"Yes, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec."

"The devil's hothouse, eh! So yer husband's been down there! I know Northern Mexico—about as well as I know Laclasse—but I've never been south of Vera Cruz. . . I know those who have, though."

"Mr. Mendall was three years in Mexico."

"Really! He can speak Spanish, then."

"Mexican Spanish," she said, smiling. "He says there is a difference."

"Yes, it's polyglot. . . . And now may I see what's in the studio?"

VII

THE STUDIO

THE studio ran the full length of the house, with almost its whole front glazed, and with casement windows at each end. The canvases here were large, and MacAllister saw at a glance were nearly all studies of the nude. If MacAllister had had any knowledge of art, he would instantly have realized that Carl Mendall would some day paint the nude wonderfully. He lacked in technique, as yet, but his flesh tints were arresting; he had subtle feeling for color.

MacAllister knew now why Mrs. Mendall had hesitated at the studio door; she had been afraid he would not like these productions of her husband's. She stood aside while he looked at them in an expressionless way. He did not like them. He had a feeling of relief when he came upon Mrs. Bagsby's portrait. He studied it critically. The banker's wife certainly had claims to beauty; an almost perfect profile, a small, beautifully shaped head banded with dark hair, a slim neck, and a long body adapted to drapery.

MacAllister turned next to a small painting of Bagsby's daughter, simply the head and shoulders. Hers was a curious face; the long upper lip and full forma-

tion of jaw suggested the soft muzzle of an animal. Mendall had done justice to what beauty she possessed, her pleasant expression, clear skin and really beautiful dark red hair.

But MacAllister had come to inspect Mendall's salable paintings, so with a touch of determination he returned to an examination of the nude. Mendall evidently liked to paint the untamed. He had painted the Indian and the half-breed. The little dusky-skinned boy who nursed a snake on his warm knee was a half-breed, a half-breed Yaqui, MacAllister thought. He had nobler features than is usual with the Mexican admixtures. The half-naked girl, kneeling before a Mexican cook-house fire, rubbing tortilla paste on a stone metate, was frankly a savage.

She was no Red Indian, and certainly not a Mexican. Possibly in the long past a vessel from across the Pacific had stranded on the Mexican coast, and the dull yellow of the Mongolian had commingled with aboriginal blood, and there had evolved this woman with skin the hue of molten gold, and the long, straight black hair and boldly regular features of the pure-blood Indian. There were rich hues in this girl's coloring; slim, firm-bosomed, warm-lipped, she was a creature of voluptuous promise. MacAllister knew the muddy-skinned, flat-featured Mexican Indian exceedingly well; he had never seen the like of this creature.

He turned about to where Mrs. Mendall stood observing him. "That's a plantation cook-house, but she's not a Mexican?" he observed.

"She is a pure-blood Tehuana."

"Ah, I see."

"It is an Isthmus tribe. The women are some of them good-looking." Unconsciously she expressed the tolerant contempt of the civilized woman for the primitive.

In MacAllister's shrug there was the repulsion which the Anglo-Saxon feels for any admixture that suggests the black man. "I shouldn't care to buy *her*. Why paint such a thing?"

With the loyalty to her mate inherent in woman, be she savage or cultured, Mrs. Mendall flew to the support of her husband. She was aroused by the raw disgust MacAllister had expressed.

"You are not an artist, so you can not understand what Carl found so wonderfully paintable in that girl. Art is the worship of perfection, isn't it? And she is an almost perfect human animal." She stumbled a little in her next assertion: "And—and the fact that she is an Indian does not argue that she is without fine human qualities. The—one of the best friends I ever had, had a few drops of black blood in her veins."

MacAllister's retort was like a flash of steel. "*Friend!* Just like ye are friend to the heathen, I'll be bound! It would have taken force to make ye bunk with her, now—wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Mendall was silent. She met the flare in his eye for a startled second, then she looked down, growing crimson.

MacAllister's heat died. He studied her averted

face for a moment, keenly. She looked frightened, and no wonder; he had some conception of how he had looked. He had certainly not made a pleasant impression on her. She disliked him. He had felt that from the beginning.

He apologized. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Mendall. I've a devil of a temper, and the prejudices of—well, of a pig-headed white man with a Scotch Presbyterian rearing. And top of it all I've evidently acquired a cowboy's manners. . . . I beg your pardon."

"I shouldn't have said what I did, when I knew that —that what you accuse me of is true," she returned confusedly.

"Of course, it's true. As true as that there are black and white and yellow races, and that there is an instinct, in the civilized man at least, against an indiscriminate mixing. It's got nothing to do with our sympathies, or our pity, or our will in the matter. Some haven't the instinct, or the feeling of repulsion, or rather it's not strong enough to stand against the call of sex. Occasionally there's a man for whom the primitive has an irresistible attraction, and that man's apt to become a Squaw-Man and stay a Squaw-Man. I've lived a bit among mixed peoples, so I've done some thinking on the subject—though it's not landed me much farther than I was twenty years ago."

"I feel just as you do—really."

"Of course you do. . . . And, having mutually confessed, let us come to business. Mrs. Mendall, I think I want to buy these paintings of your husband's

—that is, of course, supposing he wants to part with them."

Mrs. Mendall's eyes widened as they had when she first saw him standing solidly in her little reception room. "You mean all of them?"

"Most of them—all but the Indians. . . . What's your wish in the matter?"

She was evidently excited, though she tried to hide it. "I—why, I should have to consult Mr. Mendall."

"Of course. You must take time to consult and decide. Put your price on each picture, and then give me the sum total."

From his air he might be buying wheat, Mrs. Mendall reflected, and she rose to her husband's defense. "Mr. Mendall's work is really very good," she said. "He has had gratifying notices on the things he has exhibited, and he has sold quite a number. But you see," and the anxious lines showed in her brow, "he is unknown, and his things are so out of the ordinary that they are not always understood. And he does not have the faculty of pushing himself. Then he has been so hampered by teaching. He is stranded here in Laclasse. He needs a year or two abroad in order to perfect himself. He needs to be free to do his best." Her voice deepened. "If we part with these paintings, in bulk, as you suggest, it will be with that object in view. I would sacrifice a good deal to make a great artist of Carl."

She spoke as a mother would of her dearly loved

son. She was evidently a restrained little woman. She had let herself go somewhat, and was warmly flushed. MacAllister liked her. She was so humanly wholesome, and as pretty as any woman need be. He judged that she was a few years older than her husband.

"That's all very true, and your husband ought to have his chance," he agreed. "But there'll be no Paris for anybody for a good many months to come. Ye should save for it in the meantime. . . . Now I have an idea that I'll leave with ye to consider: I have a ward, a young girl, that I want a temporary home for. She's an orphan and a kinswoman of mine. Her father lived for a number of years in Mexico. She's lived abroad for most of her life, that is, up to the breaking of the war. She's here now. I could send her to school, but that's not what I want for her. She's very foreign. I want her to be in an American home, with some sensible, well-bred woman like yourself. And I want the quiet of the country for her. She says she can draw—I'd like to have Mr. Mendall give her lessons; it'll be occupation for her."

Mrs. Mendall looked at him blankly, so complete was her surprise. Then there lifted in her eyes some sudden understanding. "You say she is foreign—she is not all Scotch, then?"

"You mean she's part Mexican?" MacAllister said quickly. "She's not, indeed! There's not a drop of Indian blood in her. Her mother was a Frenchwoman, and of gude family."

"I have never taken any one into our home," Mrs. Mendall objected, much disturbed.

"And yer right to consider that—it's not so pleasant a thing to do. But I think I can say for my ward that she'll give ye no trouble at all. She's been ill, puir child. She's seen some of the horrors of war. One of the relief societies sent her to Mexico a few months ago in search of her relatives. She had fever there, and lay at death's door. She's weak yet from it. Then this climate's done about the worst it could for her —it'll take time to rid her of the cough she has. She's too nearly done to give anybody trouble."

"There is so little I could do for an invalid. I have only an incompetent mulatto maid, so I am forced to do much of my own work." It was plain she was tempted, yet hesitant.

"I've had the doctor, so I can assure ye she is not ill," MacAllister said positively. "It's simply that she has gone through a long time of anxiety and privation. This quiet place is the medicine she needs, and I'll be more than willing to pay well both for her keep, and for her lessons."

"How old is your ward?" Mrs. Mendall asked.

"Eighteen, though she looks a bit older, and no wonder, considering what she's been through."

"I must have time to think," she said, with more decision. "I must consult with my husband."

She was hedging, but MacAllister felt certain he had won. "Of course. Talk it over, and when ye've

decided we'll see about the paintings. . . . Only will ye kindly let me know as soon as possible?"

Mrs. Mendall understood perfectly: if they took the stranger in, the paintings were sold. Alexander MacAllister was striking a bargain, and, as usual, with the advantage on his side. He was a hard shrewd man; she did not like him.

Mrs. Mendall's smile, though it brought into play the dimple in her cheek, did not warm her eyes. It had been a hard struggle throughout the three years of her married life. If only Carl had a little of this man's shrewdness, and the close bargaining had not always been left to her. But Carl was as he was, and the arrangement at least offered a release from conditions that had become unbearable.

She went out to the porch with her caller and stood there, smiling, as long as there was any chance of his turning to observe her. She made a pretty picture in the sunshine, MacAllister thought, as he glanced back. A brave little woman and a wise one, evidently. He guessed that she was near tears as she stood there determinedly showing the dimple in her cheek. It was a shame that Mrs. Bagsby had chosen to invade that household. And the deviltry of the woman, to use her stepdaughter as a cover for her own flirtation! . . . And Bagsby would be the last one to guess just how the land lay. Poor Bagsby!

VIII

"SO BE IT THEN"

CARL MENDALL was late in returning that afternoon, as he had frequently been during the last few months. He was probably spending an additional half-hour in the Bagsby's drawing-room, or having been "accidentally" overtaken on his way from the high school by Mrs. Bagsby's car, was being motored home. He would be dropped at the foot of Twin Oaks Hill, while she continued her favorite ride along the boulevard. That had happened more than once before.

Mrs. Mendall's face set when sundown came, and still Mendall did not come. He always told her whether he had been sitting before Mrs. Bagsby's fire, or riding with her along the country roads, and always as if prepared to defend himself. But she had never attacked him by so much as an insinuation. If she made any comment, it was never anything but a pleasant one.

For Mrs. Mendall had married with some knowledge of her husband's character, as much as is vouchsafed to a woman before marriage, and three years of intimacy had taught her still more; not everything, for it takes a lifetime together to gain the more complete

knowledge, and even then there may be much that is not even suspected.

But Mrs. Mendall had watched Carl Mendall grow into manhood in the small New England town where they had been born. She was thirty and he twenty-five when they were married. He had been her lover since he was seventeen. Even during the year when he had starved in Paris, and the three tumultuous years in Mexico, his letters had come to her regularly. She meant something to him that no other woman could mean; that was her conviction; therefore she had married him.

Marriage had done much to unsettle her conviction, but with the knowledge that she held possession, she had put up her fight in her own determined way. In the first year of their marriage Mendall had played in artist fashion with a girl whose lithe grace had fascinated him. It was at a little mountain resort where the Mendalls were spending their vacation. Mrs. Mendall had bitten her wrists until they bled in the paroxysms of jealousy that had swept her, but with never a word to her husband. The dimple in her cheek came and went as usual when in his presence, and nightly her arms circled him, but that lithe, long-limbed girl, who could not take her eyes from Mendall, had a mother, and one day mother and daughter packed their trunks and departed from the little mountain resort. It was all done very quietly, while Mendall was away on a day's hunting, and on his return he had wondered and questioned in vain.

The next year, because Mendall had grown passionately to hate Laclasse and his teaching, Mrs. Mendall had urged their going to an artist's colony in the East. There he had been charmed by a dark-eyed woman whose dissatisfaction over the prosaic life of a dusty western town had brought her into the colony. The two had wandered the woods together until she also had gone suddenly. She went back to the dusty little town, to her husband and her child. The quiet force that was Mrs. Mendall in deadly earnest had faced her, and just what passed between them only Mrs. Mendall and the woman knew. Mendall received an incoherent letter in which the woman talked of duty to her child—that was all. But in time he suspected, and added the suspicion to his slowly broadening knowledge of his wife.

Mrs. Mendall had known for some time that another crisis was upon her, and she had not known just what to do. Her husband was playing with explosives this time. It was true that Mrs. Bagsby was an adept at the game, and that she was skilfully interposing her stepdaughter to save herself from serious injury. Frederick Bagsby was a genial unsuspicious man, but the sort who if roused would act. He was a power in Laclasse; a word from him and Mendall would lose his place in the schools. Mrs. Mendall had lived in fear of some such catastrophe.

To argue the matter with her husband would appear the simplest course, but that was what Mrs. Mendall was least likely to do. There was an ungovernable

spirit in Carl Mendall that, rasped raw as he was by the yoke of teaching, might drive him to desperation.

MacAllister's offer had parted a little the black clouds in Mrs. Mendall's sky. It would give them a little sum in bank in case of trouble. So, when at last Mendall came on rapidly through the grove, she met him with a smile.

He bent to kiss her. "I'm later than usual," he said lightly. "Mrs. Bagsby and Clare picked me up on Broad Street, and insisted on my going with them to the Country Club and having tea with them. . . . How are you? You look as bright and as sweet as these little blue flowers I picked for you over yonder." He unclasped the brooch that held her dress together at the throat, and closed it again on the flowers. But first he kissed the curve of her breast.

She flushed deeply. He had compelling ways, this clean-limbed, gipsy-like husband of hers. His lips were as fresh and as warm as an amorous boy's. Scowling and thunderous he was, at times, and when he painted he was unapproachable, but there were the many interludes that were exquisite.

"I have reason to look bright. I've sold a painting of yours to-day, Carl."

"You have!" he said incredulously.

"Maybe more than one—perhaps all of them," she returned archly.

He studied her face. "What do you mean?" he asked gravely. They had come to the porch, and he sat down, drawing her down beside him. "You're not

in fun; you're never in fun when you smile like that. What do you mean?"

She told him, and in her own fashion, exaggerating a little the impression his paintings had made on MacAllister. "He wants all but a few things that are in the studio—all but the Indians," she concluded. "Do you mind?"

"Mind—no! . . . But what in the name of Heaven's come over the man? Alexander MacAllister buying paintings! I never!"

"Carl, do you realize what it will mean? That you will really get to Paris by and by! That you'll be rid of teaching in a year or two!"

His flush deepened. "Why talk of heaven! Nothing's sold yet," he said shortly.

"That's true, and also there is a string tied to Mr. MacAllister's offer."

"I thought there was a nigger somewhere in the wood-pile."

"But it is not at all an impossible condition," Mrs. Mendall declared. "He has a ward, a girl of eighteen, a relation of his, whom he wants us to take as a boarder. He says she is an orphan. Her home was in Mexico until she was sent abroad to school, and now the war has driven her over here. He assured me he will pay well for her. He wants you to give her lessons in drawing." It was best to make plain all of MacAllister's unpalatable condition and have done with it.

"MacAllister suggest that you take a boarder!"

Mendall exclaimed hotly. "You shall do nothing of the kind, Margaret!"

"It is our one big chance, Carl."

"I won't have it! Whatever other troubles you have had, your home has never been invaded, and it shan't be now."

She was the quieter because of his vehemence. "We must do it, dear. I haven't said anything, but I have noticed. You have painted very little in the last year. Your enthusiasm is going. You need stimulation. You need other artists' work about you, and above all you need to be freed from teaching. It is ruining you, the constant state of irritation in which you are. You ought to be free, just to paint and paint. . . . Still, you need somebody to look after you—" Her voice was not altogether steady at the end.

Mendall was not conscienceless; he had struggled against the craving for the untrammeled, his distaste for the domestic, the well-ordered, the ordained and the sanctioned. It startled him to discover that Margaret had partially guessed his unrest.

He drew her close and kissed her with more than a touch of passion. "You mean I need you, Margaret, and you are right. . . . How long do you calculate you have looked after me?"

"We have been married three years—almost four," she said more steadily.

"You know you have taken care of me ever since I was born. Who used to come to you with his troubles when he was twelve, and when he was seventeen who

made wild love to you while he talked about his everlasting daubs, and his frantic determination to get to Paris and study—even if he had to cut school and home to do it? And when he had run for it and was starving in Paris, who was it still wrote to you for comfort? And, when in a fit of desperation I went to the Isthmus with the wild idea of making money, didn't I, through all the tropical steam of it, still want you? Then when I came home, ill, and with empty hands, whose arms did I want? . . . I get depressed, of course, teaching's no great delight, and I like to look at beauty, and play a little with ideas that don't grow in a middle-west town, but you stand first always."

Mrs. Mendall was not stupid; his speech sounded like an eager convincing of himself. But she made no comment—except her smile. "I still think it would be foolish to let such a chance slip through our fingers, dear. Would it bother you much, having a stranger around?" she asked.

"I wasn't thinking of myself—in a day's time I'd forget the girl existed—except when I taught her—and then I'd hate her as cordially, and be as polite to her as I am to every pupil I possess. It's on you the burden would fall. I don't want you to do it, Margaret."

"Oh, I shan't mind—not with such an object in view. I shall tell Mr. MacAllister then that we think favorably of his offer."

"But you haven't seen the girl; you don't know what sort she is," Mendall objected. "Is she a Mexican?"

"No, I told you she is a relation of Mr. MacAllister's. She is partly Scotch and partly French."

"That doesn't sound a stupid mixture, though she may be a Hottentot, for all I care," Mendall said, with a touch of impatience. "I don't want you to be bothered, that's all." He was tired of the subject. The discussion of ways and means always irritated him. The depression Mrs. Bagsby's soft laughter had dissipated was upon him again.

"If she proves impossible, we are not forced to keep her," Mrs. Mendall persisted.

"So be it, then."

IX

THE CALL OF THE PRIMITIVE

BUT when Mrs. Mendall had gone down to the living-room, Mendall walked the studio irritably. He brought up finally before Mrs. Bagsby's portrait, and looked at it. . . . They had been sailing rather close to the wind. . . . It was his restless dissatisfaction that urged him into such situations.

It had come upon him so soon after marriage, the flatness that went to bed and rose with him. Almost from the first day of his marriage there had been times when he had cursed the domestic tranquillity that was his wife's delight. In the last year it had irked him constantly—like a galling yoke. And teaching made his very flesh ache. There had been no variety, no inspiration, anywhere. In pure desperation, with some indeterminate idea that he must save his art from destruction, he had grasped at whatever stimulation had been offered him. This woman's beautiful profile had set him quivering with desire for brush and color.

Mendall turned away abruptly, and came upon the rich-hued, tropical savage preparing the evening meal for her man. . . . The miasm of the tropics! How his skin had burned, and his teeth chattered with

fever! And yet, how the jungle life, its naked savagery, its brutal indifference to man-made laws, the freedom from all bonds—how it had fascinated him! And how he had painted! . . . He remembered with a sudden, vivid delight this golden-skinned Indian girl who had ruled over his cook-house and rolled his tortilla paste for him. She had taken a primitive enough view of the domestic relation.

"He hasn't sense enough to recognize the best thing I've ever painted," he said aloud. "I'm glad he doesn't want it."

He continued to stare at his handiwork, a craving for the jungle lifting in him. His eyes narrowed on a recollection: a swamp-pool gloomed by crowding vegetation, and an escaped peon drawn down by the treacherous water moss. . . .

When Mrs. Mendall called him to supper, he was swiftly stretching a canvas; he would be at it with the first morning light.

X

MARIE OGILVIE

MRS. MENDALL was allowed only a day for preparation, for MacAllister wanted his ward installed at once. As he made no objection to the price Mrs. Mendall set upon her husband's paintings, and offered more than a generous monthly sum for his ward's room and board, Mrs. Mendall thought it best to acquiesce.

MacAllister brought her shortly after dark the next evening, coming this time in his limousine. Mrs. Mendall was alone, for this was the evening Mendall gave to the night school in Laclasse. She was glad, on the whole, of his absence; she had the uncomfortable certainty that he was going to detest their boarder.

But though her thoughts were disquieting, her greeting of the odd-looking girl MacAllister brought in with him was all he could desire. "Marie Ogilvie?" she said pleasantly. "You have an attractive name. I am glad you are going to stay with us. . . . Will you and Mr. MacAllister come down to the fire in the living-room? It is more cheerful there. . . . Or would you prefer to go to your room first?"

Marie Ogilvie's answer was indistinct, for on entering she had been seized by a paroxysm of coughing. It

was a chilly night, the air made heavy by a drizzly fog, trying enough to a sensitive throat. But Mrs. Mendall had noticed that, though strangling, the girl's eyes had taken note of her surroundings, and the little reception room, she knew, was not inviting.

"Shall we go down, Marie?" MacAllister asked. He stood by, observant of the meeting.

With her handkerchief to her lips, she shook her head.

"It better be bed, first of all," he said to Mrs. Mendall.

"Lucy will take your bag, then, and I will go up with you."

The mulatto woman, who stood in the background with eyes fastened on the newcomer, came forward, and MacAllister gave her the valise he carried. He put his hand on his ward's shoulder then. "Mrs. Mendall will make you comfortable—we'll all be endeavoring to do that to the best of our ability," he said reassuringly, "so just ye sleep in peace. Ye've come into a haven at last."

She only looked at him, a lifting and dropping of her heavy lashes, then turning followed the mulatto woman.

"Please go down to the fire—I shall be back soon," Mrs. Mendall said to MacAllister.

She studied keenly the girl who preceded her. There was nothing girlish about her. She was as tall as the average woman, and extraordinarily thin and sallow. She was so thin that it was difficult to tell just what

the contour of her face would be if it had the usual fulness of youth; not a small-featured face, certainly, and with the breadth between the eyes exaggerated. Her eyes were noticeable, light eyes, that because of their wide, heavily-fringed lids, looked sleepy. She looked as a yellow-fever convalescent might, Mrs. Mendall thought, hollow-cheeked, lips colorless, and skin jaundiced.

Yet in spite of her strange appearance she was impressive. When they came into the bedroom, she walked directly to the bed and began unfastening her coat. She showed no interest in her surroundings or in Mrs. Mendall. The gesture she made to the mulatto was regal: "Here," she said, indicating the valise and pointing to her feet. Mrs. Mendall heard her voice for the first time; it was deliberate, and enriched with a minor quality, a sort of thick resonance. She spoke with a decided accent.

The woman obeyed her, though she showed the whites of her eyes in a rolling glance.

"I hope there is everything here you need?" Mrs. Mendall asked, making an effort to be at ease.

"Yes—Madame—I have my bag. There is everything in it."

"You speak both Spanish and French, of course," Mrs. Mendall remarked.

"Oui, Madame."

"I speak French very imperfectly, and Spanish I do not know at all. Perhaps you will teach it to me."

"With pleasure, Madame. But you will be better

without my Spanish—it is—patois," she returned composedly.

"Mexican Spanish, you mean?"

"Yes."

She had unfastened her coat, but stood without any motion to remove it, her eyes fixed in a sort of sleepy intentness on her questioner. It occurred suddenly to Mrs. Mendall that the girl was waiting for her to go, and she turned at once.

"Is there nothing I can do for you—something for your cough, perhaps?" she asked from the door.

"No, Madame—there is nothing."

"If you should need anything in the night, my room is on the floor below. You must not hesitate to call me. And please sleep just as late as you like in the morning."

"I shall remember."

"Good night, then, and I hope you will sleep well."

"Thank you, Madame."

Mrs. Mendall went out, closing the door softly behind her, as one will in leaving an oppressive presence. Her hand scarcely left the knob when the key was turned in the lock; the girl must have fairly leapt to the door to have reached it in that brief moment, and Mrs. Mendall had the chill feeling that never under any circumstances could she come any nearer to the girl on the other side of the door. When MacAllister had first talked to her of his ward, she had felt that such would be the case.

The big mulatto woman who had scuttled out before

her loomed now in the doorway of her room. "Am she goin' ter stay here long?" she asked in the rich tones of her people.

"For some little time, probably, Lucy."

The woman retreated into her room. "She done fin' her place, then, maybe," Mrs. Mendall heard her mutter.

Mrs. Mendall sighed as she went down-stairs. Time would show whether she had undertaken an impossibility.

XI

"A KINSWOMAN OF MINE"

WHATEVER MacAllister may have inferred from Mrs. Mendall's expression when she returned, he received her easily enough.

There were times when he thought it best to be direct. "Weel, what do ye think of my ward?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered truthfully. "She appears older than eighteen—more like an experienced woman."

"She is eighteen in June," MacAllister said, in the same positive way in which he had vouched for his ward's parentage.

Mrs. Mendall was silent.

He studied her face a moment, his look growing determined. "I didn't intend to tell ye," he said; "I'm not given to working on people's sympathies; ordinarily I'm a man of dollars and cents, and ours is a business arrangement—but it's a refugee ye've taken in, Mrs. Mendall. That child was in Belgium, in a convent, when the war broke. She's lived for the better part of a year among destitute women and children, and wounded men. She's faced death. And when at last she got help and was sent to Mexico, it was only to

find that the turmoil there had deprived her of shelter. . . . It's an experience that would take the youth out of a girl's face."

Mrs. Mendall looked distressed. "How dreadful! I don't wonder she looks haggard and aged." She stammered a little over her explanation: "I am afraid you have misunderstood me. It's not that I did not feel sorry for—for your ward—from the very beginning. . . . It's just that I was—taken aback by her manner. When I came in I was puzzling just how it was best to treat her."

"Treat her like the very young girl she is. Be kind to her. She'll soon discover that she's among friends. . . . There's a deal more I could tell you, Mrs. Mendall, but it's unnecessary. Marie was neglected for years by her father. She's never had a home. Ye can see for yerself she's got the air of one who doesn't expect kindness from any one—like a homeless cat. And, now, everything's strange to her—people, country, climate, everything. . . . It's just pitiful!" He spoke with more feeling than Mrs. Mendall thought was possible to him.

"I shall do my best to make her happy," she promised.

"Don't ask her any questions, then," he warned.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, questions about the past. I want her to forget it all."

"I certainly shall not do that."

"There's one thing must be attended to," MacAl-

lister continued, with a return to his usual manner. "She needs clothing. She came to me with a few things tied up in a bundle. I had some clothes sent out to her this morning;"—he grimaced with a touch of his usual sardonic humor—"I went shopping like any year-old husband, and made a sad mess of it. She's evidently been used to pretty things—I want ye to take her and fit her out. Let her get whatever she wants, and turn the bills over to me. Your good taste ought to help her," and he cast an appreciative glance upon Mrs. Mendall's curves; she was gowned in white, her dimpled shoulders showing through the lace that modestly saved the gown from being low-necked.

"Certainly I will. And that ought to cheer her, too—women love pretty things."

"Ye do, I suppose?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Why, of course."

"Ye're thoroughly feminine, Mrs. Mendall, and I like ye for it. . . . I'll tell ye something: men like to see women wear pretty things twice as well as women like to wear them."

Mrs. Mendall laughed. She was relieved that he had rid himself of his grim manner. He looked a pugnacious animal when he brought his brows down over his eyes and spoke through tight lips.

"And, now," he said, "there's something more, before I go: yer having my ward here is no secret; if any one pesters ye, ye can tell them exactly how it came about, and that Marie's a kinswoman of mine. And mind ye, tell them she's no dependent on me. . . .

All the same, I'd take it kindly if ye'd not advertise the fact that I have a ward, and that she's with you. When I'm ready, I'll tell Laclasse all that, and more. . . . It's simply that Laclasse takes a deal of interest in my affairs. I know that women chatter, but in my experience the biggest gossip factory in existence is a man's club. When the average man has finished talking business, his active brain has to turn to something else, and as it's not overly stocked with subjects of interest, he's apt to gossip. And the most deadly gossip is that a man carries to a woman. She's got no great faith in the whisperings of her own sex, but what a man drops in her ear is gospel."

Mrs. Mendall knew that the warning was meant for her husband. MacAllister was thinking of Mrs. Bagsby. "We see very little of people, as you know," she said quietly, "and neither Mr. Mendall nor I are talkers. Still, I shall remember your wishes and shall mention them to Carl."

"I'll be going, then, with my mind at ease. Ye have my gratitude, Mrs. Mendall, and if there's ever any matter in which you'd wish me to stand yer friend, I hope ye'll come to me. Ye'll be welcome."

XII

A MEDIEVAL MYSTERY

WHEN MacAllister had gone, Mrs. Mendall sat down to think. His last warning had made her writhe: he knew, then, that Mrs. Bagsby had annexed her husband; probably it was town knowledge. Mrs. Mendall's hands clenched: the cool effrontery of the woman, to come into her house and pose for her husband with the deliberate intention of taking possession of him! But she might get her due. Thanks to MacAllister—and that queer girl up-stairs—she did not feel quite so helpless as she had felt.

Mrs. Mendall drew a quick breath, then turned to her more immediate concern: how much of her suspicions regarding MacAllister and his ward would it be best to tell her husband?

When Mendall came in an hour later, he found her still sitting before the fire. "You waited up for me, Margaret—that was good of you," he said, kissing her.

He looked tired. This night class of his was one of his greatest crosses, a thing to which Mrs. Mendall had persuaded him with difficulty. She had known it would be popular, and that it would please the school authorities.

"I wanted to tell you about our guest."

He sat down and stretched his feet to the fire. "I'd forgotten she was coming to-night; what's she like?"

"Queer and ill-looking, Carl, and old for her age. Mr. MacAllister told me to-night that she had been in Belgium through all this trouble. She seems to have had some terrible experiences."

Mendall's brows lifted. "Actually a refugee, then! But it's odd, if she is his ward, he didn't know of her plight," he said, with a man's quick suspicion. "Did his story hang together, Margaret? Tell me what he told you?"

Mrs. Mendall gave him MacAllister's story, and she also repeated MacAllister's warnings.

"His tale will pass," was Mendall's comment when she had finished. "It's evident he doesn't want gossip."

Mrs. Mendall wished that her husband showed the same caution: it never seemed to occur to him that the world looks on. "I think Mr. MacAllister knows what to tell, and what to keep to himself: he has certainly never told Laclasse that he was married."

Mendall stared at his wife. "He's not married, Margaret—he's never been married!"

"Laclasse thinks he has not; but I know he has. . . . He married a girl who went to the same boarding-school at which I was in New York—the Garden School, on Fifth Avenue. I was only fourteen then, you wouldn't remember about it. There were a number of southern girls in the school; the girl he married was in the senior class. She was lovely to

me, in spite of her being older, and we were great friends, so it made a deep impression on me—her having a lover and marrying. I remember his face perfectly. He was wildly in love with her. She was French; he met her in New Orleans, she told me. They were married, and he took her to Mexico. He was only about twenty-four, but he had a position in some mine. Things didn't go well with them, though, for they separated in about a year. She wrote me all about it."

"If you knew all this history of Alexander MacAllister's, why didn't you tell me of it before?" Mendall asked, with a touch of sharpness. More than once before he had had examples of her secretiveness; she worked quietly but surely, this little wife of his.

"I had no idea until he came here the other day that this man was the boy who married Eugenie. I had never seen Alexander MacAllister of Laclasse until the other day."

"And why didn't you tell me then?"

"Because I wanted to see this girl first, and make sure my suspicions were correct."

"But he wouldn't bring a loose girl to us, Margaret! He'd house her somewhere else."

"I don't mean that, Carl! *She is his daughter.* . . . There was a baby came just before Eugenie left MacAllister. She wrote me about it. It was born eighteen years ago in June. She took her baby and went to France; her father's relatives were there. When she died she left her little girl to them. I think

now the war has brought MacAllister's daughter back to him."

"But why doesn't he acknowledge his daughter?"

"He probably has his reasons. At any rate he does not acknowledge her, though evidently he means to provide for her."

"Aren't you going a good deal on guesswork, Margaret?"

"No! Now I have seen her, I am absolutely certain."

"So we are harboring a medieval mystery, are we!" Mendall exclaimed, with a flash of his usual irresponsible humor. "Well, I never!"

XIII

CROSSED SWORDS

MRS. MENDALL awaited with interest and some trepidation Marie Ogilvie's first appearance at the breakfast table. The girl was evidently going to appear, for she had heard her moving about her room.

But when finally she came in, Mrs. Mendall received her placidly. "You are an early riser," she said, smilingly offering her hand. "I hope you slept well?"

Marie gave her hand deliberately—a slim long-fingered hand, Mrs. Mendall noticed. "I usually wake early, Madame."

Apparently she was quite at ease. She had not changed overnight. She had the same distant, low-spoken manner, though in the sunny morning light she looked more attractive, for her head was bared, showing an almost incredible thickness and length of hair, which in the shadow of the doorway had looked black, but the instant the light played on it rippled with yellow, the tawny hue that in her eyes was permanent. Mrs. Mendall had never seen anything quite so astonishing as her hair—it was so full of lights and shadows.

And her attire was almost as remarkable. She was

clad in a red silk kimono such as any department store can furnish, but her waist and hips were several times wound by a wide, exquisitely gold embroidered and deeply fringed sash of which any stage beauty might be proud, and across her shoulders was a beautiful black lace mantilla. The ends of the sash hung to her ankles, a little lower only than her two thick braids of hair. Mrs. Mendall's downward glance showed her that Marie's stockings were red silk, and her satin slippers, encasing small slim feet, also were red. MacAllister had evidently gone shopping to some purpose. But the gaiety of her attire gave no brightness to her face. An extraordinary sight she was, as bright-plumaged and as sad-faced as an aged macaw.

"And you found your room comfortable?" Mrs. Mendall inquired, while she made her observations.

"Quite so, Madame."

She studied Mrs. Mendall with the sleepy intentness of a somnolent tiger, and then bestowed the same deliberate attention on the room. Mrs. Mendall had the feeling of helplessness that had oppressed her the night before. Just how was she to treat such a strange incongruous creature? She had such a vast calm about her; as if from her cradle she had been accustomed to deference. MacAllister's advice seemed hardly applicable. Still, she had no better to follow.

"Breakfast is not quite ready, Marie," she said, infusing into her manner all the elderly she could. "Until it is, suppose you go out on the terrace and look about you. It's a wonderful morning, warm as June.

Put the scarf over your head so you won't add to your cold."

She was so instantly obeyed that she decided MacAllister was right: the girl's composure was not hauteur; she was simply very shy.

Marie went out to the very verge of the terrace; but there she stood planted; she showed none of a young girl's curiosity, or desire for movement. She glanced swiftly backward and upward at the house, then gazed steadily down into the ravine. There was a tangle of undergrowth there, and big cottonwoods. Everything wore its dainty overslip of pale green, sly disclaimer of the nakedness of winter.

As Mrs. Mendall watched her, she thought of what MacAllister had said; this prairie country with its wide reaches must seem strange to the girl. She said so when she called her in. "Your journey must have seemed endlessly long to you, Marie."

"Yes, Madame."

Did the girl have nothing but monosyllables at her command, Mrs. Mendall wondered. Her manner certainly did not invite a continuation of the subject. She sat with eyes on her plate. Probably her journey had also been a painful experience.

Mrs. Mendall was casting about in her mind for a safe topic when Mendall appeared. Clothed in a blue bathrobe, he hurried into the room and took his place at the head of the table and, without so much as a glance at Marie, applied himself to the poached egg the mulatto woman placed before him. It was his

habit on warm mornings to paint dressed only in his pajamas and sandals, and to breakfast in that attire. Mrs. Mendall guessed that this morning a recollection, grown hazy because of absorption, had probably obtruded itself, and the bathrobe was a vague tribute to convention.

Mrs. Mendall was shocked. She had forgotten to warn him. Her well-ordered mind had never been able to adjust itself to the unconventionalities that were an inseparable part of him. She knew instantly that he must be wrapped in a new creation. But to appear before their boarder in this fashion, and with the added insult of not even sensing her presence!

She looked at Marie in confusion, and found her studying the new arrival in her sleepy yet intent way. She saw at once that she was not in the least embarrassed by Mendall's attire; it was his face she was considering. His hair was tousled like a boy's. His cheeks were thin; he had the good height and well-carried head, the clean firm leanness of an athlete—a black-browed, olive-skinned, vivid-eyed youth. His forebears had been seamen; men who owned ships and sailed around the world in them. Mrs. Mendall often thought some ancestor of his must have captured and married a Spanish girl, giving to the Mendalls their gipsy coloring, and that Carl had caught from the ocean the color of his eyes, its gray as well as its green. It was Mendall's mouth that showed maturity; it was already lined, and expressive of full twenty-nine years lived much of the time in dissatisfaction, a modicum

in self-indulgence, and a large half in intense striving. It was the arrogant upper lip that spoiled the almost perfect molding of mouth and chin. Just now he wore his withdrawn look of striving.

But an introduction was necessary. Mrs. Mendall broke in on his absorption. "Carl, this is Marie Ogilvie. . . . Are you so deep in your painting this morning that you can't speak to either of us? You are really dreadful!" Yet under the reproach there was a heart full of love. Marie glanced from one to the other, a mere lifting and lowering of her heavy eyelids.

Mendall started. "Eh?" he said, looking up. Then he sat bolt upright, for his eyes had leapt from his wife to Marie. They swept her, then focused intently.

"God!" he said softly; and as he stared, and in a lower tone: "Of all the *wonders!*" The quiet energy of the expression was tremendous; Carl Mendall was wide awake now.

Marie shrank visibly, but Mrs. Mendall thought she guessed his meaning. "Carl! Will you ever behave like other people!" she exclaimed, half laughing, half angry. "He is admiring your hair, Marie—any artist would."

Marie's only answer was the flush that turned her dusky.

Mendall somersaulted back to his usual manner. "So, Señorita, I am to teach you to use a pencil?" He had a quick smile—as frank as a boy's; yet, even while smiling, he continued to study her intently, from her

hair to her thin shoulders, and back again for a questioning of her eyes.

Her color ebbed, and her eyes narrowed as she met his look; then she drew the curtain of her lashes. "My guardian says so, Señor."

"And he is a man to be obeyed. . . . Señorita, have you had yellow fever?"

Her denial was steadily given. "No, Señor."

Mendall bent to her, vividly reminiscent, speaking rapidly in Spanish. "But you are from the Tehuantepec National? You know it, surely—its steaming heat, its fevers and its seven plagues of Egypt! It is fit only for reptiles, that country of slaves! . . . And yet it has fascination. I dreamed of it all night!"

She looked at him with dilated eyes as he talked, as if for the moment hypnotized. Then she stiffened, slowly; her thin shoulders lifted, her lip curled in savage disdain, high enough to show her teeth, even, white and sharp. Her eyelids had drooped until her eyes were a mere yellow gleam in a dusky setting. "Señor, you are blessed with imagination," she said, in her huskily accented English. "I know nothing of the Isthmus; of its fevers, its slaves, or its reptiles. It is possible to contract fever in almost any part of the world."

It was the longest speech she had made since entering the house, slowly delivered, but with an air of vivid intelligence. Mrs. Mendall had begun to wonder if it was stupidity that made her so monosyllabic.

Mendall shook his shoulders as if to throw off an

obsession. "Pardon me, Señorita," he said, smilingly incredulous. "I was thinking of the jungle, and looked up to see you, and for some reason you fitted in with my visions."

Marie did not appear to hear him. Her speech made, she had become again silent and immobile. Mrs. Mendall was distressed. Whatever it was Mendall had said in Spanish, it had evidently savagely angered the girl. The two were antagonistic—as she had feared they would be. It was going to make things difficult.

She motioned to Mendall to be silent.

He shrugged, then asked in a different tone: "When do you want to begin your drawing lessons, Señorita?"

She answered without lifting her eyes. "Whenever my guardian wishes."

"This morning?" he asked.

Mrs. Mendall interposed. "Carl, I think the lessons should wait until Marie is more rested. I am sure Mr. MacAllister would advise it."

"What does Miss Marie herself say about it?" he returned.

Possibly he wanted her to look up, but she did not; the lowering of her wide eyelids seemed to be her guard from encroachment. "My guardian will come in a few days—I shall wait till then."

"Yes, that is best," Mrs. Mendall said, anxious to smooth over the incident. "You will be feeling better then." She was thoroughly annoyed with her husband for persisting in teasing the girl. He had taken a dislike to her and chose to be aggravating.

Marie remained silent, and Mrs. Mendall was relieved that her husband said no more, though he looked at Marie frequently and intently. The striving look which Mrs. Mendall called his "painting look" had come back to him.

When he rose and hurried out, Mrs. Mendall began to excuse him. "You must not mind Mr. Mendall's odd ways, Marie. When he is painting he is not accountable. He is full of queer fancies. Often he is so absent-minded that he forgets to see you, and when suddenly recalled, stares you out of countenance. You will understand when you know him better."

Marie surprised her. "I am quite used to artists, Madame. They do not disturb me in the least."

"I suppose in Europe—" Mrs. Mendall stopped abruptly on the question.

Marie passed over it and asked a question of her own. "Did Mr. Mendall go to Mexico to paint?"

"No, he was on a sugar plantation. From what he has told me, it must have been a dreadful experience—yellow fever and starving beaten people. The Indians of the Isthmus appear to be little else than slaves—poor wretches! And the crawling things!" She shivered. "Fancy having scorpions drop on your breakfast table!"

Marie asked one more question: "Does Mr. Mendall paint portraits?"

"Sometimes. He likes best to paint the nude. One great difficulty here is the lack of models. There is no opportunity at all here for a man with his talent."

Marie said no more. She subsided into silence as suddenly as she had awakened. She had finished her breakfast and sat evidently waiting for orders.

Mrs. Mendall suggested that they go out on the terrace. "There can be nothing better for you than to be in the open air," she advised. "You must feel free to go about just as you like. The whole house is open to you—except the studio. Out here you can walk in any direction, only I should not go far; there are so many trees about the house that it is easily lost sight of."

Mrs. Mendall was not without a sense of humor. She was thinking that should Marie in her brilliant attire suddenly appear before a gipsy caravan she would certainly be annexed. She had also a somewhat grimly amused realization of the sensation Marie would create should she cross the road before Mrs. Bagsby's automobile—a wildcat with yellow gaze for the domesticated panther seated in cushioned ease! Mrs. Mendall had not the same feeling of helplessness she had had the night before, but she did not feel in the least drawn to MacAllister's daughter. The girl had looked like a savage when she had bared her teeth. She was very certain that few people would like Marie.

Marie received her instructions obediently. They parted finally, and she stood still until Mrs. Mendall disappeared in the house. Then she whirled about, turning her suddenly convulsed face to the open, and plunged down the slope into the ravine.

XIV

GETTING AWAY FROM BOREDOM

IT WAS noon before Mrs. Mendall missed Marie. Earlier in the morning Mendall had opened his studio door to tell her that he wanted no lunch, that he was painting, that he must not be disturbed. It was his usual procedure when he was fortunate enough to have a day to give to his painting; she thought nothing of that.

But Marie's absence worried her. The girl's lunch cooled on the table; she was not in her room; she was not in the grove. Mrs. Mendall searched for her, at first anxiously, then in real alarm.

She was forced finally to go to her husband. "I have been all through the grove, and down to the creek," she said breathlessly. "What can have become of her, Carl? I am dreadfully worried. Could she have walked too far and been taken ill?"

"The creek's not deep enough for her to drown in," Mendall returned absently, and went on with his work, a big canvas upon which was rapidly coming into being the giant vegetation of the jungle, crowding in upon an oozing mat of vivid water-moss.

"Of course it isn't! What an idea!" Mrs. Mendall exclaimed, horrified.

"She'll drown—by degrees—in this thing I'm doing."

In her fright Mrs. Mendall took her husband's arm and shook him. "Carl! Wake up! You must come and help me! I am sure she has simply gone out of sight of the house and lost her way. I warned her not to do it."

"Oh, *damn!*" Mendall said, throwing down his brush. "Now the rest of the day's done for!"

Then at sight of his wife's pained and frightened face, he lifted her up and kissed her. "I wasn't swearing at you, Margaret; the Lord forbid! If I was cursing any one it was that girl. There's trouble for somebody written all over her. She's safe enough; I'll find her."

Mrs. Mendall went through the grove and looked down the hillside to the car line, while Mendall went down the stream in the ravine. He crossed it, and climbed the slope for a short distance, until he came to the edge of the meadow.

As soon as he reached the open he saw the huddled heap of red. He guessed at once then how it was, so walked lightly until he stood over her. She lay in the cup made by two big roots of a gigantic cottonwood, close to its trunk, curled up like a tawny kitten asleep in the sun. Her hair was loosened, and was spread over her, the sun making a golden mesh of it, a network of gold threads over the crude red of her dress. Its warmth had long since dried her lashes, and was painting her lips red, even setting a fleck of color

in her cheeks. Pillowed on her arm, her face looked fuller, younger, hinting of luxuriance. She had the promise, certainly, of tropical beauty; the gold in her hair was like the yellow streak in a tiger's coat.

Mendall stood for some time looking down on her. It was plain she was wrapped in the sleep of exhaustion that had come after long weeping; the stain of tears was still on her cheeks. She had probably lain awake the night through, perhaps for many nights, the same watchful unrest an animal shows when it first loses the sight and smell of its accustomed surroundings.

Mendall bent close to her. Her sleep was almost as breathless as a faint. He knelt beside her then, and for some time longer studied her, the texture of her skin, the slim hand with its almond-shaped nails, the sharp upthrust of her thin shoulder, the hollow between the lift of ribs and her well-defined hip, and the long clean line of leg which from the knee down was exposed—except for the sheer iridescence of silk stocking. Either the breeze or some movement in sleep had caught aside the light kimono.

Her foot had shed its slipper, and Mendall looked at it; it was so perfectly arched, so beautiful in line and in the formation of the toes. Their nails showed glossy through the thin covering of silk. No wonder such a foot disdained a slipper! It was a thing that should go uncovered. . . . A shiver passed over him; what an anatomy to paint!

Mendall's common sense, of which he did possess a modicum, had at once suggested that even the dry bit

of earth she had selected was no bed for a fever convalescent, but, as always, the artist in him had demanded its satisfaction first. And now, after he had gazed his fill, he was seized by one of the freakish impulses to which he was subject: could he carry her without waking her? It was worth trying. She was skin and bone, so she would be no great burden. And if she waked, it would simply mean an explanation; that would be entertaining.

He bent and cautiously slipped his hands under her, turning her against his breast, lifting her gradually, and then, with infinite care, raising himself until he stood upright, her head on his shoulder. When he began to walk, her head slipped and rested against his chin. Looking down he saw her face foreshortened, the line of brows, the lashes on her cheeks, and her slightly parted lips. He looked at her frequently; at any moment her lashes might lift. It was a bit like playing a game, his skill matched against chance.

Then, as he went on, he began to feel an added enjoyment in what he was doing. She was not so light as he had thought, but his strength rose to the demand with a curiously pleasurable effort. Her body was warm against him, and an increasing weight, and yet her thinness gave her an odd unsubstantiality, as if she might escape from his hold. He did not have the feeling of possession. The immediately emotional in him was roused. He began to have the familiar feeling of walking on air, and that the thick pounding of his heart had no connection with the steepness of the

climb. He came straight on up the terrace, tingling to his finger-tips, quite unconcerned that his wife had rounded the house and was staring at him.

She hurried up, choked with fright.

He looked at her through a mist of yellow hair. "Only asleep," he whispered. He was hotly flushed, and with a line cut deep between his drawn brows.

"Carl, she is too heavy—" she whispered in return.

Mendall only frowned and hurried on. He was so forcibly gripped by the fear that she would make him put his burden down that he went faster than she. He went directly through the living-room, paying no attention to the voice behind him. He kept straight on, not halting until he had laid Marie on her own bed. He had a moment then before Mrs. Mendall reached the top of the stairs. He knew perfectly well what he craved, the wish the tickling hair against his chin had tantalized into desire. He bent and kissed her, a quick close pressure upon lips that her waking effort parted beneath his. . . . The next moment he was in the hall. He stood before his wife, white now, and catching his breath.

"Carl, you are trembling all over—you have hurt yourself!" she exclaimed, thoroughly annoyed.

"I haven't—hurt—myself—" he declared unevenly.

"But why did you do it? Is she ill?"

He braced himself to speak more collectedly. "No. . . . But she may be, after lying out there on the ground. She had cried herself to sleep—I didn't want

to wake her. . . . I'm going down now to work, so don't disturb me."

Mendall shut himself up in the studio, and hurriedly taking up his palette, dabbed the brush in the oil as if nothing had happened in the last hour. The brush twitched in his unsteady fingers; the painting before him was a blur; he was shaking from head to foot.

He looked down in a shamed way at the foolish, trembling things he was trying to hold. "Mad?" he said aloud. "Yes—in a way. . . . It's the same everlasting trying to get away from boredom!"

He put his painting paraphernalia down, and going to the couch lay with face pressed to the pillows, while the excitement pounding in him ebbed. He knew then from his utter weariness that he had strained every muscle in his body; even his brain was inert. . . . Then, suddenly and unaccountably, he plunged into sleep.

XV

SURMISES

IF MARIE had overheard the brief conversation in the hall, she showed no sign of it when Mrs. Mendall hurried to her bedside.

She looked bewildered. "How did I come here, Madame?" she asked huskily.

"Mr. Mendall found you in the ravine—he carried you up," Mrs. Mendall said, with a touch of acidity.

She was thoroughly disturbed. It was just like Carl to do such a foolish thing; and like him to hate Marie the more for having moved him to a few moments' pity. If he had hurt his back she would come near to hating the girl herself—in spite of her being ill and unfortunate. Mrs. Mendall's feelings were somewhat mixed and not altogether clear to herself.

"I must have become faint," Marie said softly.

"Do you feel ill?"

"No, Madame—I only wish to sleep." She closed her eyes.

"Perhaps that is the best thing for you," Mrs. Mendall said doubtfully. "I can let Mr. MacAllister know and get a doctor if you feel ill."

"No, Madame—I am only tired." She certainly looked it, heavy-eyed, sallow, exhausted.

With a mingled feeling of pity and repulsion, Mrs. Mendall covered the girl's thin body and bare jaundiced arms. When she began to breathe softly and regularly she left her. Sleep was, of course, the best restorative.

But as soon as the sound of steps had ceased, Marie drew herself up into a sitting posture, her brows drawn in a heavy scowl. She lifted the hem of the sheet and wiped her lips, her brows still lowered in anger.

Then, suddenly, she relaxed into the impish mirth that had seized her when she had discovered the tawny cat, possibly a sudden ebullition of overstrained nerves. She gathered her knees in her arms and pressed her face against them, rocking to and fro—until galvanized by the sound of steps, she straightened out into apparently sound slumber.

It was Mrs. Mendall descending to the living-room. She had paused for a time at the studio door, and then gone on; the caution she usually used in dealing with her husband had kept her from going in. If he was suffering he would promptly come to her for aid; he always did.

And when at dinner-time he appeared, apparently refreshed and quite himself, she made no reference to the incident of the morning—except to say that Marie was still asleep. For, when late in the afternoon she had gone up to see how she was, she had found that the girl had undressed and gone to bed and was apparently sleeping soundly.

"Sleep is the best medicine for her. She'll be about

as usual to-morrow," Mendall said carelessly. "Let us sit on the porch; it's the first warm night of the season. We are certain of having this evening, at least, to ourselves." He was feeling secretly apologetic to his wife for his unexplainable lapse.

When darkness came, he flung a cushion down beside her chair and sat with his head against her knees, not talking much, but with an occasional caress for her hand. Mrs. Mendall knew that it was, in part, his way of thanking her for not scolding. He was a boy, in some respects, this husband of hers, and a very lovable one, in spite of his faults.

But it was of the girl up-stairs Mendall was thinking, even while kissing his wife's hand. He had studied her closely as she lay sleeping; there were surmises rioting in his brain which he did not care to impart to his wife.

XVI

THE HINT OF THE DUSKY

BUT for some obscure reason the incident of that day fixed in Mrs. Mendall's mind the conviction that Marie was not destined to be liked by any member of the household. It increased rather than lessened her pity for the girl, and as pity may be compounded of repulsion and a certain amount of solicitude, Mrs. Mendall was clear as to her own feelings.

But Margaret Mendall regulated her life in accordance with plan. Her likes and her dislikes and most of her thoughts were hidden things. She had a deeply embedded prejudice against MacAllister, and yet the dimple in her cheek welcomed him, and never more demurely than the first time he came to visit his ward.

"Weel, do I find a united household?" he asked, as his car drew up at the steps.

"I think so."

"My ward has settled in peaceably?"

"She is no trouble. It must be good for her here, for she is looking so much better already."

"Of course," he said, as he shook hands. He took note of her, from her neatly dressed hair to her tiny slippered feet. "I should think it would be 'good for' any one here." As on the first day he had seen her,

he liked her pretty-mannered aloofness. Her carefully-covered dislike of him amused him.

"Shall I tell Marie you are here?"

"No. When I turned in from the boulevard I saw her climbing Twin Oaks Hill. I'll follow her presently."

"She is out-of-doors most of the time. I thought she ought not to take up her drawing until she is stronger."

"Ye're right," he agreed decidedly.

"I shall take her next week to do some shopping."

"Whenever ye're ready. Let me know and I'll send the car to bring ye in."

"Marie seems to like rich colors," Mrs. Mendall ventured.

A shadow crossed his face which he covered by a slight grimace. "I'm afraid that's a predilection you'll not be able to eradicate. I went shopping for her and you see the result. But let her have her way. It's a small matter to us, and it may mean a deal to her. I believe women take their moods from the clothes they wear—particularly women who have a passion for color. . . . And now I'll go see what Marie has to say for herself."

When Mrs. Mendall took him around to the terrace to show him the path that led down to the ravine, Mendall saw them from the studio window above. He had been watching Marie. He watched MacAllister now in the same absorbed way, as he went down into the

ravine and then emerged from the cottonwoods. Mendall was keen-sighted and could see the meeting on the hillside. MacAllister reached her, and then his figure blotted her out. The next moment he had taken her arm, and so, his hand upon her, they disappeared over the crown of the hill.

Mendall turned back into the studio, frowning. Margaret had her convictions as to those two. He also had his, but they differed from hers. He had overheard the day before what amounted to a row in the kitchen:

"Where was that girl raised, what's stayin' here?" Lucy was demanding of Margaret.

Mrs. Mendall had told her.

"Huh! Reckon she think herse'f somebody. Nobody ain't worth her speakin' to."

"She is very shy," Mrs. Mendall explained. "She scarcely speaks even to Mr. Mendall and myself, but we would never think of being hurt over it."

"She can speak fast enough when she's a-mind to!" the woman stormed. "She didn't look *shy* to me when she done turn me outen her room jes' now!"

"What do you mean, Lucy?" Mrs. Mendall had asked.

"She come up an' foun' me cleanin' her room. I jes' pass her the time of day, an' her eyes done shut up like slits; she look at me like she goin' ter bite. 'You do your work after this when I'm not about,' she says, an' flingin' de door open, pointed me down de stairs!"

"How strange! She must have been feeling ill," Mrs. Mendall soothed.

Lucy had laughed shrilly: "Huh!"

"She did not mean to be rude," Mendall had heard his wife say. "We must remember that she has been brought up in Europe. Her manners are strange to us. Don't think any more about it."

"Oh, I ain't thinkin' about *her,*" Lucy declared scornfully. "She can keep outen my way, an' I'll keep outen hers, but jes' let her bite at me again, an' I'll sure ask her where'd she get her yellow face?"

"If you do any such unpardonable thing, you will go, and at a moment's notice," Mrs. Mendall had said sternly. "Miss Ogilvie is my guest, and a rudeness to her is a rudeness to me."

"I ain't layin' to be rude," the mulatto woman protested, somewhat subdued. "We jes' naturally hates each other."

Mendall had been deeply interested in the conversation.

"You heard the commotion, of course, Carl?" Mrs. Mendall said to him afterward.

"Yes." He was always succinctly indifferent when Marie was mentioned.

"They do hate each other. Marie treats Lucy as if she were empty air, and Lucy shows the whites of her eyes whenever she comes near the girl."

"Better hire a white woman if you want to avoid trouble."

Mrs. Mendall gave him a quick glance and fell into

silence. It was plain to her that he was repelled by the hint of the dusky in Marie—just as she was.

Presently she remarked: "Do you notice how much better Marie is looking? Her skin is clearing. I think when her face gets fuller she may be good looking—in a way."

"Possibly. Her hair is astonishing," he returned, so coldly that Mrs. Mendall dropped the subject. He appeared to like Marie as little as did Lucy. He avoided her as much as possible. It might be hard to keep the peace when it came time for him to give her lessons; almost impossible if she proved stupid.

The truth was that Mendall was completely interested in studying Marie. He was painting absorbedly and at the same time watching the girl. He could have told his wife far more than she could tell him about the change which was taking place in Marie's appearance. She fattened as rapidly as a starved animal. He was well aware that her sallowness was changing to the color one sees in rich cream; that her lips were beginning to show carmine; and that as her thin cheeks gained fuller contour her mouth appeared less full-lipped. She was fast losing her haggard look.

He could also have told his wife how completely Marie was absorbing her new environment through those tawny eyes of hers. She asked no questions, never obtruded herself. She spoke to express her few needs, or in return to polite greetings—that was all. She had her method with each member of the household: throughout the first week she did not once look

into Mendall's eyes; to Mrs. Mendall she was remote but instantly obedient; the mulatto woman she did not see. Except at meal times she was in her room or out-of-doors. She would find a spot not too near the house and sit by the hour in the May sunshine, doing nothing, apparently not even thinking.

Though there were plenty of opportunities, Mendall did not attempt to talk to her. Even when his evening walks took him near some spot where she sat motionless, catching the last rays of the setting sun, he would pass her with merely a brief, *"Buenos noches, Señorita!"* But shut up in his studio he eagerly painted a recollection of the Isthmus which the constant sight of Marie's haggard face kept vivid. He rose at extraordinary hours to do it, and rushed home from his hated classes to continue. When the light failed him he turned his easel to the wall and went for long walks in the country. He forgot Mrs. Bagsby; for a week he made no effort to see her. Sometimes he wondered, half guiltily and half mischievously whether Marie had waked in time to realize his kiss; she kept her eyes so determinedly lowered.

But his thoughts, his surmises and his suspicions and what he was painting and why he was painting it, Mendall kept strictly to himself. He had had too many examples of his wife's watchful guardianship of his errant fancies. Marie had brought him both interest and distraction. Out of his various surmises he had selected a few certainties: Marie Ogilvie might be both Scotch and French, but she was something else

as well; she was no inexperienced girl; and Mendall did not believe, with his wife, that Marie was MacAllister's daughter.

And now, when he turned abruptly from the window after watching MacAllister and his ward disappear over the crest of Twin Oaks Hill, it was to stretch a canvas as ample as the one he had given to Mrs. Bagsby's portrait; in a few days Marie would be his pupil. He had definite intentions regarding Marie Ogilvie.

And, as he worked and occasionally glanced at the hillside opposite to see what had become of the two, his thoughts escaped him in a brief sentence: "She's a half-breed Delilah, down on her luck—or I'm a fool!"

XVII

THE WILDCAT AND THE PANTHER

BUT Marie appeared to be in no haste to begin her drawing lessons. She showed far more interest in her wardrobe.

As MacAllister had promised, Townley brought the car for them the following week. Mrs. Mendall noticed that Marie adapted herself to the cushioned ease of the car and to Townley's obsequious attentions with her usual air of superb indifference. As she lay back, silent as always, and with slow gaze for the country, it struck Mrs. Mendall that there was something innately regal about the girl. Her long cloak hung upon her, her hat, one of MacAllister's choosing, was unbecoming, and the sickly hue still muddied her skin; nevertheless she was an arresting personality.

Mrs. Mendall discovered that even the chance wayfarer took note of Marie. They had gone for about a mile along the boulevard when they passed a motorcyclist who had stopped to photograph Penn's Point, a view of the Missouri frequently photographed and always pointed out to the tourist. He was too busy with his kodak to give more than a glance to them, but a mile farther along, when Townley stopped for what

was only too evidently a badly collapsed tire, the cyclist passed them, giving them an interested stare as he went.

He rode on for some little distance, then turned and came back. "Want help?" he asked the chauffeur.

Townley was evidently thoroughly put out by the necessity of adjusting a new tire and the consequent delay. It seemed to Mrs. Mendall that he was anxious to make a good impression on Marie, he was so markedly deferential; as if in some way he had displeased her, and was trying to gain her good will. He had apologized to Marie for the delay, looking troubled as he did so.

But his answer to the cyclist was curt: "No."

It did not send him away, however. He did that most irritating of things—he stood about and watched Townley work, offering a word of advice now and then.

The chauffeur concealed his annoyance with difficulty; he apologized again to Marie. "I'm sorry, Miss, I'll 'ave it on presently. I 'ope it'll not make you late, Miss?"

"It does not matter," Marie said coldly.

Though he looked a gentleman, the intruder appeared to be a busybody. "He ran chances starting out with that tire. It's a good thing you have another," he remarked to Marie.

Marie had studied him in her sleepily intent way when he had first appeared, taken note of his small slim body neatly attired in corduroy, and his dark

face, to which a goatee and mustache gave an air of distinction. His motor-glasses hid most of the upper part of his face. One might suppose him an American until he spoke; then it was evident, from his slight accent, that he was a foreigner of some sort.

Marie made no answer; she did not even look at him. Mrs. Mendall felt that it was not incumbent upon her to say anything, and Townley also treated the remark with silence, though his irritation was plainly enough shown by the way in which he flung the cut tire aside, in such fashion that it struck the intruder's feet.

Whether in resentment of the snubs to which he had subjected himself, or out of mischief, the cyclist drew away a little and, unslinging his kodak, deliberately photographed them.

Townley lifted from his work just in time to see what he had done. He sprang up. "See, 'ere! You put that up!" he said angrily.

The man laughed at him, though he made haste to remove himself and his cycle to a safe distance. "The public highway is free to all," he declared. Then as he mounted and made off, he called over his shoulder to the irate chauffeur: "Don't be so rude next time some one offers you help, my man!"

Townley set to work again, red in the face and muttering.

Marie made no comment on what had passed, and Mrs. Mendall thought little of the incident, except that it had been disagreeable, until they came into Laclasse

and she noticed that Marie seemed to be marked for attention. Then she thought it quite possible that the cyclist had hung about in order to look at the girl. There was the usual morning crowd on the upward slope of Broad Street, and an even larger number of automobiles than usual, for all feminine Laclasse appeared to be spring shopping. Every one who glanced at their car looked at Marie; many looked a second time. Some, Mrs. Mendall knew, recognized MacAllister's car; Laclasse was still a town, with a town's characteristics. But the weather-dried farmers, as well as the paler-skinned tourists bound either for the Pacific Coast or the East, also stared at Marie.

They passed people whom Mrs. Mendall knew. Andrew Kraup and his son, Ellis, stood for a moment beside their car at a crowded crossing, and Mrs. Mendall saw how intently both men studied Marie. It was town talk that the war was hitting Andrew Kraup's firm hard, and that MacAllister was making a mint of money out of what was his rival's misfortune, and that Kraup was bitter over it. It was natural he should be interested in the queer girl who sat so regally enthroned in MacAllister's car. They doubtless wondered how she herself came to be there. Even after they moved on, Mrs. Mendall's backward glance showed the two men rooted to the curb and still staring.

Their next encounter was one which deepened the pink in Mrs. Mendall's cheeks; they waited for a few moments side by side with Mrs. Bagsby's car. Clare,

who was with her stepmother, nodded and smiled in her usual friendly fashion:

"Buying hats, too?" she asked. She also looked at Marie.

Mrs. Bagsby bowed and smiled languidly. Her dark-fringed violet eyes rested on Mrs. Mendall for a mere moment, crossed Marie's sleepy gaze, enveloped MacAllister's car, and came back to Marie. Marie had given Mrs. Bagsby's immediate surroundings much the same comprehensive attention. On Mrs. Bagsby she bestowed a continuance of her sleepy regard.

On entering Borrough Nast's, the principal emporium of Laclasse, Marie showed that she needed no assistance from Mrs. Mendall. She took the lead. To the floor-walker she announced: "I wish to have silk undergarments."

But when shown the counter, she disdained it. "Have you no room where you show such things?" she asked regally.

"There is the show-room where we display our imported models," the man said in dignified surprise at the unusual request.

"Ah, you have costumes also, then! You will take me there; I wish many things."

It was soon evident that she "wished many things," and of a make not to be procured in Laclasse. Both evening and street costumes were shown her, but she declined to retire into a fitting-room with any of them. She showed open contempt for the short-waisted, wide,

gathered skirts eulogized by the girl who waited upon her. She demanded long lines and warm colors.

Marie finally dismissed the gowns with a gesture, annihilating with a glance the insistence of the shop girl. "I wish nothing of this sort. They are not the right make. You will remove them."

"You'll not find anything handsomer in Laclasse," the girl retorted with asperity. "They're good models, all right."

"Doubtless—but I do not wish them," Marie returned. "Kindly have silk undergarments sent up to me."

"You'll find them down-stairs," the girl said with American bruskness.

Mrs. Mendall was about to intervene when the head of the department appeared. She was a clever sales woman who visited New York every year. She comprehended Marie at once, and whispered her instructions to the shop girl. "But that's last year's and the lace overdress 's sold," the girl objected.

"You get it," the woman ordered, "and then tell them to send up whatever she asks for."

"It" proved to be a long garment of some light, satiny mesh, dull gold in color, when the light struck it, almost russet. It was a clinging thing, with neither sleeves nor collar.

"Here is a lovely thing," the woman said.

At the sight of the garment Marie's eyes narrowed and she rose. She held its flexible length against her slim body, twisted and turned before the glass, in-

tently observant of line and color. By some chance the really artistic thing had stranded in Laclasse and had not found an admirer.

"I will put this on," Marie announced.

Mrs. Mendall was uncomfortably conscious that Marie had an audience. Mrs. Bagsby and Clare had appeared a few moments before, and, though Mrs. Bagsby was inspecting motor-coats, Mrs. Mendall knew it was Marie she was watching. Mrs. Mendall had no doubt that they had been purposely followed, and as she had no intention of introducing Marie, or in any other way satisfying Mrs. Bagsby's curiosity, she kept her back turned.

When Marie came from the fitting-room swathed in red-gold and sat down elbow on knee and chin in hand to examine in leisurely fashion the undergarments that were now heaped about her, Mrs. Mendall was conscious that Mrs. Bagsby forgot finesse and stared.

They all did for that matter, for Marie was an arresting vision. She had emerged definitely a woman, and a striking one. The clinging flexibility of her gown accentuated her suppleness; it's red-gold paled her skin to a creamy pallor, and her two bronze braids which she had wound about her head gave her height and dignity. And yet, curiously enough, she looked more youthful. There was less of the haggard girl, and more of the very young woman about her. Her air of supreme calm became her better.

Marie seemed entirely oblivious of the sensation she had created. Her method of choosing lingerie amused

them all; she rubbed the garment against her cheek, after the fashion of an oriental rug-dealer, and if its texture pleased her, she ordered it to be laid aside as chosen.

The pile grew to such dimensions that Mrs. Mendall became uneasy. Silk stockings Marie appropriated by the dozen. When she announced that she wished, after choosing a motor-coat and bonnet, to visit a dressmaker who would be capable of artistic creations, and was directed to Miss Fuchs, Mrs. Mendall was really alarmed.

While Marie was trying on a long red silk motor-coat, Mrs. Mendall sought a telephone. It was MacAllister's voice that answered.

"And how do ye do, Mrs. Mendall?"

"Marie and I are at Borroughs Nast's," Mrs. Mendall said a little breathlessly, "and I feel I must ask your advice—do you want us to keep within any specified sum?"

"So my ward's buying Borroughs Nast's out, is she?"

"No—no! It's just that everything she is getting is so *expensive*. For instance, the gown she has chosen is seventy dollars, and the motor-coat I think she will choose is fifty."

MacAllister's chuckle reached her. "They're both red, I'll be bound."

"Yes, they are."

"Weel, I think I'd let her have them, Mrs. Mendall."

"There will be other things, too. She wants to go to Miss Fuchs—you know she is very expensive."

"Never mind. Let her have what she wants."

"I am sorry I troubled you; but I didn't know whether you would approve."

"It's all right; ye're never any trouble at all."

Mrs. Mendall returned in time to witness an incident. Mrs. Bagsby had insinuated herself into Marie's neighborhood. Marie was adjusting before the mirror a red motor bonnet. Mrs. Bagsby in a pale blue motor-coat stood at her elbow, making use of the same mirror.

"We ought not to stand anywhere near each other, should we?" Mrs. Mendall heard her say in a voice rippling with laughter.

Marie appeared to be conscious of her presence for the first time. She turned and studied the intruder gravely. There was a perceptible pause before she answered, and then it was softly and in French. "In a room with many mirrors it should not be necessary."

Mrs. Bagsby answered with only a somewhat blank smile, and Marie interpreted her remark deliberately. "In a room with many mirrors it should not be necessary. . . . I perceive that Madame does not understand French; also that she has a predilection for this mirror." The cool indolence of Marie's husky tones needed no interpretation.

Mrs. Bagsby flushed crimson as she moved off, murmuring a "Pardon me."

Clare, who was seated, waiting for her stepmother, rose in haste and went to the window, Mrs. Mendall guessed that she might laugh unobserved, and Marie was left in possession of her mirror. Her yellow glance swept them all; then she became absorbed, as before, in her purchase.

Though inwardly smiling, Mrs. Mendall greeted Mrs. Bagsby gravely as she passed her. . . . And she had actually imagined, in the beginning, that Marie was shy!

Mrs. Mendall reflected in grim amusement that Marie certainly had some of MacAllister's hard fiber; the girl knew perfectly well how to take care of herself. And it was also plain that she had made an enemy. Mrs. Bagsby scrutinized their departure so smilelessly. From the garments she had chosen Mrs. Mendall judged that Marie meant to see something of Laclasse society. At the very outset Marie had flung her gauntlet in the face of one of Laclasse's social leaders; Mrs. Bagsby might make it a little disagreeable for her later on.

Mrs. Mendall felt that their day together had given her a better knowledge of MacAllister's daughter. She liked her no better, though she was forced to grant that the girl had intelligence—of a kind.

XVIII

"BUT I PLEASE YOU?"

MRS. MENDALL learned more of Marie in the ten days that followed. She discovered that there was one person to whom Marie was sweet, submissive and attentive—and that was MacAllister.

His daughter certainly pleased him, for he came to see her almost every day, riding over from the plant, which was in full operation now. He came usually in the evening, after closing hour at the plant, and often he remained until late. Sometimes he walked with Marie up the slope of Twin Oaks Hill, or he took her riding with him, or, on inclement evenings, they sat in the reception room.

It became evident that Marie had MacAllister in mind when she had made her extravagant purchases. Mrs. Mendall remembered that he had said he liked to see women wear pretty things. Marie always made herself beautiful for his coming. Her brilliant kimono, anything, provided it was loose and comfortable, served her during the day, but at supper she was always gowned in her best. She made a golden coronet of her hair, and lessened the yellow in her skin by a careful use of powder. With the exception of two simple street costumes, Miss Fuchs' creations were all

designed for afternoon or evening wear, and all of rich enough colors to pale her skin.

Mrs. Mendall understood now her love of flame red and the combinations of red and gold; she looked whiter in those colors. The one cream-colored gown upon which Marie ventured was of so deep a shade that it paled her skin. She evidently abhorred the jaundiced hue fever had given her. Mrs. Mendall suspected that she had just as little liking for the warm creamy tint that was natural to her in health.

MacAllister's eyes had widened when he saw her for the first time in her red-gold sheathe and with hair high. Marie had come down to the porch, so Mrs. Mendall had witnessed their meeting.

"Eh, child, but ye're a sight!" he exclaimed. He eyed her appreciatively.

Marie smiled; it was one of the few times Mrs. Mendall had seen her smile. "But I please you?" she asked softly.

"Ye're just plain beautiful; it's that I'm thinking," he said, with almost lover-like enthusiasm.

In her own mind, Mrs. Mendall did not agree with him; Marie was certainly brilliant and strange looking, but far from beautiful. She was his daughter; it was only natural that he should see beauty in her when others did not.

But Marie seemed satisfied.

MacAllister looked next at her small bronze slippers. "Are ye proposing to walk up Twin Oaks Hill with me, in those?" he demanded amusedly. There was a boy-

ish air about him when he smiled and teased in this fashion.

Marie lifted her skirt and looked at her slippers with the air of a naughty child. Mrs. Mendall was forced to grant that the girl's feet were beautiful; as small as her own, and more shapely. Marie looked at MacAllister from beneath her lashes. "I will put on others if you wish—I will take the dress off, also?"

"Oh, no, ye'll not!" MacAllister returned quickly. "That stage dress becomes ye. Just get yer coat and we'll ride."

But when Marie had gone, MacAllister remarked gravely: "Watching over a girl's a bit of a responsibility."

Mrs. Mendall agreed with him, but she did not add that she thought he had a particularly difficult problem on his hands. He probably realized that. His next remark certainly showed solicitude.

"If I were better acquainted with the child, I'd know better how to plan for her."

"She seems fond of you, and eager to please you; it is affection that makes children obedient."

He made no reply, and Mrs. Mendall thought he looked uncomfortable. She took herself to task, for she felt she had come a little too near his secret.

He said no more until Marie returned in her new motor-coat and bonnet. He took note of them also. "So that's yer automobile outfit, is it?" He studied her admiringly. "It suits ye, I must say. A regular red-

bird, ye are. . . . Weel, let's go show ourselves on the boulevard."

As the days passed it was more and more evident that his daughter had taken hold on him. He rarely moved his eyes from her when they were together. She appeared to amuse and interest him completely. He almost always brought her a gift when he came. She made him laugh and smile—and frown, too, on occasion. His was certainly the air of possession.

And it was evident that his coming was the event of the day to Marie. Mendall could have told his wife how impatiently Marie walked the floor when for some reason MacAllister did not come, and how like a restless animal she padded about her room after MacAllister brought her back from some ride or walk. Her room was directly over his studio, and when his frequent attacks of sleeplessness kept him sitting late over a book, or when he came in from walks that lasted until midnight, he often listened to Marie's movements. If MacAllister was exercised over her, she was certainly no less exercised over him.

Mendall was getting restless. During those ten days when Marie was busied with her wardrobe and MacAllister, nothing had been said about her drawing lessons. He had finished the painting which had absorbed him. He waited in secret impatience and outward indifference for the thing he wanted: for Marie to become his pupil. He did not venture to question, but suspense never sat gracefully on him.

It got the better of him one evening, the night of the twelfth of May; Marie had been with them now for three weeks. He had come out to the porch, to his wife, just after MacAllister had ridden off with Marie. Ordinarily he was not to be drawn into talk about her, but to-night he looked after Marie's red-cloaked figure with bent brows.

"So the Señorita has gone forth again in her Spanish colors," he remarked sarcastically.

Mendall always addressed Marie as "Señorita," and always with the faintest suggestion of mockery. And Marie always called him "Señor," and with equal indications of antagonism.

"I wish you didn't dislike her so much, Carl," Mrs. Mendall returned.

"I don't dislike her," he protested, with less show of irritation. "I understand her, that's all."

"I don't find her likable, either," Mrs. Mendall confessed. "I doubt if any one but Mr. MacAllister will. He certainly is fond of her, and she seems to be of him. It's natural, of course."

"She's making herself solid with him—that's the first and most important thing to her," Mendall said dryly.

"You mean she is 'working' him, Carl?"

"Of course she is."

"Perhaps she is," Mrs. Mendall said thoughtfully. Then she smiled at him. "But it's not a matter that need concern us. It's the first time you have shown any interest in her, Carl."

Mendall was instantly on his guard. "It's just that I've run out of work, so I've had time to notice." He bent and kissed her. "I am going out over the hills. Perhaps they'll give me an inspiration. I'll be late—don't you dare sit up for me!"

Then he teased her a little, his hand under her soft chin. "You look tired; you've spent most of the last week in town, Madam. Are you investing in clothes like the Señorita, or have you an admirer over there?"

"Carl!" she protested, blushing. She was not ready to tell him why she was going every day to Laclasse.

"If he shows his face here, I warn you I'll shoot him!" Mendall declared gaily, as he went off.

Mrs. Mendall sighed. She knew what troubled him: he had finished one piece of work and was restlessly looking about for another. He was always miserable when not painting. . . . And Mrs. Bagsby was away. Mrs. Mendall had gathered from what she had overheard Mrs. Bagsby say to Clare at Burroughs Nast's, that Mrs. Bagsby was going for a week's motor trip.

But she did not want to think of Mrs. Bagsby. She took her husband's advice and went to bed.

XIX

A CATACLYSM

IT WAS nearly midnight when Mendall returned to what was apparently a sleeping house. He was not sleepy, so he sat down in the studio to read.

He soon discovered that he was not the only person awake and stirring; Marie was moving above him, walking around and around her room. MacAllister had probably brought her back only a short time before he himself had returned.

Mendall dropped his book and listened, his thoughts circling about her, as had become habitual with him. He had told his wife that he understood Marie. The statement was somewhat far-fetched, for he was convinced of only three things: that Marie was not what she appeared to be; that she had designs against MacAllister's money; and that she carried about with her an uneasy conscience. The rest was all surmise.

The thing that Mendall puzzled over, and that he was considering now, was Marie's past. He was very certain that she was an adventuress, and that she had mixed blood of some sort in her. Where had she originated? What had she been? And by just what means was she inveigling MacAllister? MacAllister's

morals were doubtless those of the average man; certainly he had too much sense to bring into a reputable household a woman of whom he had suspicions, or upon whom he had designs. But he was no more astute in certain respects than many another financier who becomes putty in a clever woman's hands. It was quite apparent that he thought Marie what she represented herself to be—a relation of his, possibly his daughter—if it were true, as Margaret had said, that MacAllister had thrown his wife and child aside.

As he sat with head tipped back against his easy chair, Mendall constructed half a dozen pasts for Marie, and as many possible futures. The conviction that Marie was an impostor did not shock him in the least. He simply had an intense desire to study her, and at shorter range.

The movements above him ceased, finally, and for a time there was silence—until, from some slight sounds in the direction of the window above, Mendall judged that Marie was keeping vigil just as he was; seated at the window, probably, and looking out at the night. Mendall's windows were widely open also, and putting out all but the shaded light on the table, he also looked out at the trees which were touched by a meager moon. The elm at the side of the house stretched a branch that in rough weather tapped on Marie's window; she sat in a bower. Mendall could see only the trunk and the lower branches. . . . He sat on, constructing more and more vague pasts and vaguer futures, with the even vaguer intention of going to bed

when he heard Marie move to do so . . . until he slipped into a fog that was half a dream. . . .

Mendall was aroused by a thud and a muffled roar, an earthquake shock that rocked the house into a confusion of splintering glass and tottering objects, a wavering motion that ceased, as it had begun, abruptly. He had not been shaken out of his chair, only jolted upright, out of vagueness into the consciousness of frantic screams, of footsteps rushing down the stairs, of Margaret, in her nightdress and with hair down, clinging to him.

"Carl! What is it?" she gasped.

They stood in less of wreckage than Mendall had imagined. The lamp was precariously near the edge of the table, but still burning; small objects lay scattered on the floor, and a canvas had fallen from an easel.

"I don't know," Mendall said dazedly. "I was asleep. . . . An earthquake—"

"The window in our room is broken into pieces—something struck it—"

Mendall was cool as soon as he recovered from the daze of sleep. "But you're not hurt, Margaret. . . . Who's screaming up-stairs—Marie?" He made for the door.

"Don't go, Carl!" Mrs. Mendall implored. "It may come again!"

Mendall had never experienced an earthquake or he might have had doubts as to the nature of the shaking they had received. "Oh, no, it won't. It's over.

It was rather a severe shock, that's all. . . . Come up with me; she must be mad with fright to scream like that!"

It was not Marie who was shrieking; it was the negress. Marie's door was open; she was not in her room, and Mendall remembered now the rush of footsteps on the stairs.

He had regained all his faculties, and the irresponsible humor that was apt to attack him at unexpected moments made him laugh while he shook the mulatto back to reason. Lucy lay with head covered, calling wildly upon the Lord, while her bare brown legs kicked viciously at Mendall, whom she took to be the devil trying to lay hold on her.

Mendall had to exert force before he could roll her over on her back. "Stop your noise!" he commanded, when he had succeeded in making her open her eyes. "If you yell like that, the devil's sure to get you, you idiot!"

"O Lord! De jedgment day am come!"

Mrs. Mendall had lost her fright. "It's only an earthquake, Lucy," she soothed. "It's all over."

"Make her put on some clothes, Margaret, and come down," Mendall advised. "She'll start in again if she's left alone. I'm going to find out what's become of Marie."

He guessed where she was, and that she was probably the only person in the house who was awake when the shock came. He found her outside. She had gone out into the grove, and stood looking toward Laclasse.

"It's only an earthquake, Señorita," he said when he reached her. "Come back to the house. There's no danger."

She turned to him a face that, even in the dimness, looked ghastly. "It is no earthquake, Señor—it is the plant."

"*No!*" Then as the certainty took hold on him: "My word! I believe you're right! An explosion, of course!"

Marie turned away. "They have worked more quickly than I thought," she said desperately. "Oh, if *only* no one is killed—"

The remark struck Mendall as curious. "You mean the plant's been blown up?" he demanded.

"I do not know—how should I know? I only guess, as you do," she said hurriedly. "But whoever was there would be—killed—" She caught her breath on the last word.

Her manner startled him. "I believe I'll go and see what has happened!" he exclaimed. "It's not more than half a mile if I take the short cut. We can't even see from here whether there's a fire."

Marie turned to him eagerly. "Ah, Señor, will you go! I will go with you—then I will know!"

"Very well! But it's a rough way up through the ravines—I don't know whether you could do it. Still. . . . Come back to the house and we'll see." Mendall was eager enough to have her with him—if Margaret could be managed.

But Mrs. Mendall would not hear of his going, even

though Mendall omitted to mention that Marie wanted to go with him. "You mustn't, Carl!" she said in terror. "If there has been one explosion there may be another. I should go mad with fright!"

Marie slipped away when she heard Mrs. Mendall's decision. Mendall caught up with her just as she reached the door of her room. When the light had shown him her face he had been struck by her look almost of horror. She was tense and quivering.

"I am going, just the same, Marie," he said. "I'll persuade Margaret. But you had better not try to come with me—I know she won't allow that."

"Señor, I shall be grateful to you if you will go and come back quickly," she implored.

"I told you, I'm going; but why are you so anxious? Who do you think might be killed?" he demanded, determined to know the reason for her urgency.

"Monsieur MacAllister went there after he left me, Señor. He was there. I think they have killed him," and, turning abruptly, she locked herself into her room.

XX

"WHAT'S DONE IS DONE"

THOUGH Mendall kept his promise to Marie and went off to the plant, it was not he who brought the first news of its destruction to her.

While the morning was still hazily gray, Marie's acute ears heard the burr of an automobile as it turned from the boulevard into the grove. She was down the stairs and on the porch before it drew up at the steps. At the first glance she saw who drove, and the certainty changed her from a haggard woman to a softly smiling girl. When MacAllister came to her, her face was alight.

"Ah, it is *you!*" she said with a vivid note of joy. "I have been in terrible anxiety!"

"That's why I came—as soon as my brain cleared enough to remember that ye'd be thinking I was buried in that heap they've made over there."

"But you escaped—and without being hurt?"

Her hands strayed over him anxiously, for he looked as if he had just dragged himself out of a pile of débris. He was streaked and smudged with dirt and caked to the knees with mud; pale and disheveled and with all the marks of excitement upon him.

"I wasn't there when they did their devil's work, or

I'd not be here," MacAllister said grimly. "Ye're responsible for my escape. I was fully meaning to go when I left ye last night, but I was thinking of ye and not of where I was going, so I passed the turning of the plant before I knew. I was minded to come back; as I told ye, there were things I wanted to see to at the office of the plant; but it was late, and I decided I'd come out in the morning. It was just by that little chance I escaped. I was in town when I heard the explosion. . . . There's nothing but a hole in the ground—where the office stood, Marie."

Marie caught her breath. She drew him into the little reception room, while he talked, closing the door on Lucy's open-mouthed interest. Mrs. Mendall was also coming up from below; they would be surrounded by questions in a moment.

"And the plant is destroyed—completely gone?" she asked quickly.

"The main building's blown into pieces and my machinery's scattered in bits all over the country. The other buildings are shattered so they're no account. . . . It's a nasty mess they've made, *damn them!*" He ended in a suppressed fury that flushed him.

"But no one was killed?"

MacAllister hesitated; he did not like to tell her. "One of the night watchmen, Marie. We've found enough to identify him. Another's slightly injured, and a third we've found no trace of yet. Perhaps it's he did the mischief."

Marie grew paler. "Ah, Monsieur!"

"I've no right telling ye such things, but the papers will have it in all its ugliness for ye to read. There were reporters out almost as soon as I was, and now the place is thronged. All of Laclasse will be there by noon—looking on my wretched property." It was plain that there was hurt pride as well as anger working in him.

"But you will not go on with it—now the plant is gone?" she asked timidly, and yet with eagerness.

"Go on!" MacAllister answered, his eyes aflame. "Yes, I'll go on! Before night comes I'll have a force clearing a place for new buildings. I'll give Mr. Kraup and his tribe a surprise!" He swore profoundly, and asked no pardon for it: "By ——, I'll go straight on!"

Marie was not too frightened by his violence to plead. She came close and put her hand on the clenched fist he had brought down on the table. She stroked it, her face lifted to his. "Ah, but see what you have escaped! It will only bring more trouble, Monsieur."

MacAllister looked down on her, frowning heavily. "Ye're of my blood and would be intimidated by plain lawlessness! What's come over ye? It's not my blood that's speaking in ye now. I've seen nothing but courage in ye so far, and been proud of it!"

Her lips quivered at his biting reproof. She looked down. "I do not wish trouble to come to you—" she said with difficulty.

MacAllister softened on the instant. He drew her to him. "I'm just a plain brute!" he said against her

cheek. "I'm clean beside myself this morning! Ye're a tender-hearted girl—just as I'd have ye be. God knows ye brought me a blessing when ye brought yerself to me."

Then at the look she gave him, his rough hand turned her lips to his, and he kissed her, a long pressure to which she responded, hesitatingly at first, then with intensity. Her arms lifted to his neck and clasped him, as tightly as he held her.

The warmth of her response took MacAllister's breath. "So ye have it in ye to love me like that—" he said unsteadily. "I'm glad ye belong to me, and I mean to do right by ye. I'm glad ye had the courage to come to me, with the confidence of a child coming to its father."

"You have been a father to me, ever since I came," Marie said in a smothered way.

"No, I've not. I've not known exactly what to make of ourselves these three weeks. I'll confess, I put ye out here, away from people, that I might study ye a bit. It's the cautious Scot in me suggested that. It's been like making acquaintance with a stranger to whom one feels drawn. I told ye last night of the trouble that came to me when I was little more than a boy and before ye were born, and of the hurt and regret that's been eating into me all these years. I want to do for ye. I needed just what ye've brought me. . . . I was thinking last night of ways and means. There's no one knows that I had a wife and child. There's only one person besides yerself to whom I've ever told

all I told ye last night. I'm no talker, and neither are ye; ye're a bit like me in that. We'll give no histories to the gossips, either yours or mine. Laclasse will learn ye're my kinswoman, and that's enough. I can do for my kinswoman as I see fit—I can adopt her if I wish. I've had experience in the harm gossip can do a woman; I've suffered from the wagging tongues in Laclasse, and so has the woman of whom I think a deal. The fewer explanations we make the better. . . . Ye'll help me in what I intend to do, Marie?"

"I will do whatever you say—I am grateful that you love me." She was dully flushed.

And MacAllister had talked himself back only to an appearance of calmness. His voice betrayed how thoroughly he was stirred. "I want ye just to stay quietly here and get back yer strength," he continued. "Busy yerself with yer drawing, or whatever ye like, until I'm free of all this excitement and trouble the plant's brought on me. Then we'll see. I'll come often, and we'll learn to know each other better. We'll be real companions. Just ye continue to call me 'Monsieur'; I like it. I'm glad there's affection between us; it's a real joy."

He was flushed and abrupt in his speech, evidently deeply moved. He ended with an attempt at lightness, patting her cheek before he turned to go. "I came just to relieve yer mind, but now I must be going. I'll return at the first moment, so just ye take good care of yerself till I do, little daughter."

And Marie smiled also, though she still looked

flushed. But when his hand was on the knob, his going an actuality, her flush deepened into a look of distress, and, suddenly, she gathered decision. "Monsieur, you intend now to find who destroyed your plant?"

MacAllister turned quickly. "If it takes every detective in the country!"

"You think it has been a German plot?"

"I am certain of it, Marie. I thought I'd taken every precaution, but they've got the better of me. I shut out the Austrians, and they've been seething. A clever head and a little money is what has done the work. It was a bomb destroyed the main building, that's sure, and the powder that was about did the rest. There's been no time yet to sift evidence, but I'm going to the bottom of the thing." He ended grimly: "I'd give a good deal to get Andrew Kraup on the witness-stand."

Marie studied him through narrowed eyes. She looked utterly unlike the anxious girl who had pleaded with him, or the flushed woman who had kissed him. "He may know something, Monsieur, but I think you have had an enemy close to your elbow who could tell you far more than he."

"What do you mean?"

"Your chauffeur, Monsieur."

"Townley! Townley's an Englishman. I know where he stands. He's the best servant I've ever had."

"He is no Englishman, Monsieur. He is deceiving you."

"Tell me your reasons?" MacAllister asked gravely.

"I have only suspicions, nevertheless I am certain. The night I came to your door he opened to me. I have seen many Italians; I was so instinctively certain he was an Italian that I spoke to him in Italian. He was quick, he answered me in English, but for one instant I saw his expression. He understood perfectly, and pretended he did not. He is Italian; he is in disguise. And the times I have seen him since, I have studied him; he is deceiving you."

"He told me he didn't know a word of Italian. . . . But even if he is Italian, he would have no object—I've favored the Italians at my plant."

"It is the fact that he is deceiving you that is suspicious. Ah, Monsieur, it is those who are renegade to their country, who consider themselves of no country, that do the work of spies. They speak every language, and assume every disguise. They see their advantage in turmoil. They would be quite willing to work for these Austrians who are angry—for any one who will pay them. They were all about us in Belgium. One went in fear and hatred of them. One felt them through one's skin and shivered. Ugh! I loathe them worse than a snake!" She showed her teeth in savage disgust, a look that made her tigerish.

MacAllister stared at her, astonished not only by what she had said, but also by her expression. She looked like a jungle thing; fear and hatred transformed her.

"It would be astounding if you were right; but I

can't think it. Yer fearful experience has worn upon yer nerves, Marie. . . . It's Andrew Kraup and German money that's at the bottom of last night's work. I know it. He hates both me and my plant."

"He may be. The Germans are in deadly earnest, Monsieur. Every missile you manufacture means a bit of the fighting force taken from them; they look at it in that way, so it may be. But, whoever the plotters, the first thing they would do would be to put a spy upon your every movement; your thoughts, if they could."

MacAllister was impressed in spite of himself. "Ye may be right," he said thoughtfully. "But it was not Townley did last night's work. That was done by some one who knew his way about the plant."

"That would not be his part. He is simply set to watch upon you."

"The man's got nerve, then! 'Twas at my telephone call he brought out the chief of police."

"He has not gone, then?" Marie said quickly. "He is kept to watch you still."

"He'll not have the satisfaction long!" MacAllister returned grimly. He was thinking of the many bits of information that even his caution had let slip in Townley's presence.

"Ah, no, Monsieur! Do you not see that to send him away, or to show in any way that you suspect him, would be the unwisest thing? Do you not see what an advantage it gives you to keep him, and quite unsuspicious that you suspect? He has friends; he receives

letters; you may have in him a means of discovering the person who wrecked your plant." She was flushed and eager.

MacAllister looked at her admiringly. "To think that ye've got so clever a woman's head on ye! I'll do the very thing ye suggest. I'll set the keenest detective I can get upon Townley. It may lead us to Kraup in the end."

Though certain of his enemy, MacAllister had had no very clear idea of how to reach him. That he was triumphed over had hurt him even more than the loss of his plant. He looked both pleased and excited. He put his hands on Marie's shoulders. "I'm grateful to ye, Marie. Ye're as sweet as a child, and yet ye have a woman's brain."

She looked up at him, her color ebbing. "If you keep a guard near you, he will help to protect you," she said earnestly. "I beg you to do it, Monsieur. I think you do not realize your danger. See how nearly you have escaped death. And if you go on with your plant—" She began to play with the lapels of his coat while the color left her face entirely. "Ah, Monsieur, if you have confidence in my judgment, please listen to me without being angry. I am terrified, and because of the things I have seen—men torn to pieces by shell, and women weeping over their children. Why will men permit such things? Is there no other way but to kill? It is like a great cemetery over there—full of groans. Last night when I walked about wringing my hands, thinking I must weep like

those women, I cursed war. This great country has seemed so peaceful, and yet here is the strife brought to your very door. . . . Monsieur, build up your works again, if you wish, and make again the iron things that are useful—they brought you much money —but the fearful things that kill—please do not make them! I fear so greatly that harm will come to you because of it."

MacAllister flushed darkly. He was as completely surprised by her return to pleading as he had been by her keenness. But he did not reprove her as he had a few moments before. Since then she had stirred something in him that was compelling. She was pale and quivering and utterly in earnest; lovely in her pallor and the way in which she clung to him.

He caught her to him. "Ye're a deal better pleader than Bagsby, and just because ye are a woman! I didn't know ye were so frightened about me, dear?"

"Yes, Monsieur. . . . I do not deserve that you should think well of me—but you are all I have—"

"Ye're just sweetness itself!" MacAllister said thickly. "If I'd only had ye by me these last fifteen years—" and he kissed her, her cheek and her hair, holding her the more closely because of the shyness that kept her lips turned from him. For though her hand pressed his cheek, there was an air of withdrawal about her, as if she was fearful both of her own temerity and the intensity of feeling she had aroused.

But he found her lips and kissed them. "Ye belong to me—and no one else . . . and there's a fu-

ture—" he said, almost incoherently. Then he put her aside with reluctant decision. "One thing I know: there are things ye know nothing of shall go by the board—from this day on. It's none but clean hands should touch ye."

He caught up his hat, but at the door he turned. "I'll think over all ye've said. If I'm guided by ye, it's the first time I've let sentiment get in the way of business; it's clean against my principles." And with that he was gone.

Marie went up to her room and, as usual, locked herself in. The newly risen sun tipped with glistening light the leaves below her window-ledge. Over the tree-tops she could see the golden bend of the Missouri, the steady, ceaseless, yellow flow that man's hand could not stay. She looked at the symbols of the inevitable, still tense, held by emotion. "What is done, is done," she said, as if she spoke to the sun or the river.

She looked about her then, at the white purity of her room, and, suddenly, some sustaining force in her broke. She went to her bed and threw herself down, burying her face in her arms. From the intensity of her distress her whispers sounded like a prayer: "Oh, Maria de la Guarda—Maria de la Guarda—"

And, yet, it was the usual immobile and unobtrusive girl who showed herself to the Mendalls later on.

XXI

A WIFE AT FAULT

A FEW days later, just as they were leaving the breakfast table, Marie announced that she was ready to begin her drawing lessons. She addressed herself to Mrs. Mendall, not her husband: "I am ready now, Madame, to draw."

Mrs. Mendall hesitated. She wanted to go into Laclasse that morning, she must go, yet she was afraid to leave Marie to Mendall's uncertain temper. He abominated stupidity; he would become sarcastically polite, and with Marie the result might be disastrous.

"Have you the morning, Carl?" she asked, hoping that his reluctance would invent an excuse.

Mendall had long ago decided that he would show no enthusiasm over these lessons. Besides, Marie had shown no appreciation of his exertions in her behalf on the night of the explosion. She had promptly returned to her usual antagonistic attitude. "Why—I suppose I can manage it," he said, and went out, leaving his wife to follow with Marie.

This was not an auspicious beginning, but Mrs. Mendall made the best of it. She did not believe that Marie could draw. She felt certain that her husband's patience would be tried to the utmost.

Mrs. Mendall granted that Marie had intelligence of a kind, a certain distrust of those about her that guarded her from encroachment, the instinct of withdrawal and the capacity, inherent in most animals, to strike when molested. But she thought Marie both senselessly lavish and lazy, two qualities her New England sense detested. The girl sunned herself like a savage, and adorned herself like one. Mrs. Mendall had an unalterable contempt for the civilized woman who retains the attributes of the savage; she could not conceive of Marie's ever creating anything.

She ushered Marie into the studio pleasantly, however, and while Mendall took charge of his pupil, busied herself in dusting his always disordered desk, ready to intervene if necessary.

Save for a single glance, Marie paid no attention to her surroundings. Mendall asked her no questions; he simply placed her, then set her a difficult task, and stood so quietly at her side that his sudden exclamation, when it came, startled Mrs. Mendall.

"Who taught you to draw like that?"

Marie glanced up at him. Mrs. Mendall caught the retaliatory glint in her eyes. "An excellent instructor, Señor."

Mendall stood for a moment looking down at her. "Have you ever painted anything?" he asked then.

"Si, Señor." She slurred the Spanish words almost to a hiss.

"Water colors?"

"Si."

"Have you anything to show me?"

"Some sketches—they are much soiled and torn."

"Suppose you get them."

Marie left the room, and Mendall watched her go, intently observant of her every motion. Her gown, her purchase at Burroughs Nast's, swathed her so closely that it accentuated her naturally undulating walk. She was deliberate, well-poised, feline in lightness of tread.

Marie had appeared at breakfast in the gown, and Mrs. Mendall had been resignedly thankful that Marie, if she considered the garment a negligée, had had sufficient regard for appearances to wrap herself in a chiffon scarf. The scarf was red, of course. It covered her arms and shoulders, concealing to some extent her sinuosity. The gown was a ridiculous thing to wear in the morning; it had cost seventy dollars, and Marie wore it with as little self-consciousness as a washerwoman would her calico wrapper!

Mrs. Mendall had noticed that at the breakfast table her husband had given Marie's attire a cold scrutiny; no wonder he looked after her now with an expression of chill distaste. It was a blessing the girl could draw. Ever since their first encounter, Mrs. Mendall had feared that, if angered, Carl would ask Marie—more politely than Lucy, perhaps, yet pointedly enough—how she came by her "yellow face." He was capable of cruelty when angry.

"I am glad she is not going to be a dead weight, Carl," she said, with a note of relief.

Mendall started and turned. "No—she'll do."

"Does she really draw well?"

"Yes. She has the technique."

"I want to go into town this morning, will you two really get along without friction if I leave you together?" she asked anxiously.

Mendall's exclamation was hardly a laugh. "Margaret! . . . No, at the slightest provocation I'll box her ears, or shake her! . . . You've precious little confidence in my powers of self-control. Don't you know I'm always polite to my pupils—execrably so, if they can't draw? But Marie knows how to handle a pencil." He bent and kissed her, flushing as he did so. "Fretter!" Mendall was not as a general thing given to deceit, but he knew his wife well enough to predict that Marie would not be allowed in his studio if she suspected even a tithe of the interest he took in MacAllister's ward.

Mrs. Mendall held his cheek to hers. "I am relieved, I assure you. I have been worrying about the long summer with that queer creature here in the house, and her father insisting upon drawing lessons. You would be bored beyond endurance."

"She'll not bore me, dear. . . . Go on, and don't think about us. She's safe enough from my wrath."

"I'll be back for lunch," Mrs. Mendall promised, from the door.

XXII

MENDALL GAINS A MODEL

MENDALL was still flushed when Marie returned. She offered the sketches indifferently. "I have but three, Señor."

"Sit down and show them to me."

Mendall helped her straighten out the sketches; they had been tightly rolled, and were, as she had said, creased and soiled. Mendall took them for Mexican street scenes. They were good work, done with a full brush and expressive of directness and verve.

"You must have done these in Mexico," he remarked.

Her lip curled. "You are amusingly skeptical, Señor. I told you the first time I saw you that I knew almost nothing of Mexico. These are of Spain."

"I had forgotten," he apologized. It was plain enough that she realized his interest and curiosity and resented them.

She continued. "You have been in Mexico—I in Spain. I am told that in parts Mexico is very like Spain."

Then with elbow on her crossed knees, and hand beneath her chin, a posture that lifted her face to his

downward look, she began the soft flow of words that unfolded her surprise: she had visited every gallery of note in Europe; the names of the old masters slid easily from her tongue; she spoke of famous paintings as one would of intimate friends; she knew Paris and Rome far better than he did. Without any direct statement she showed that she was accustomed to luxury, matured by travel—an experienced woman, was Mendall's mental comment. . . . And she could talk! Deliberately in English, vividly in French, softly and sibilantly in Spanish.

Mendall understood: it was, in part, an attempted vindication of the dumb creature she had appeared; in part, a sly sop to his curiosity, a defiance of his surmises. She concluded with a direct challenge:

"I have noticed these paintings of yours, Señor—the primitive interests you. It interests me also. I have pondered the sayings: 'One drop of black blood is enough to muddy an ocean,' and 'Once an Indian, always an Indian.' When sitting in the cafés in Paris I used sometimes to wonder: 'If this place should suddenly be transformed into a Mexican cook-house, would an educated but starving half-breed necessarily drop to her haunches to eat tortillas, while her equally hungry sister of pure white blood looked around for a chair?' Would they not be likely to squat there together, Señor?—the ancestors of both were in their time savages. Are not such reprehensible ancestral habits inherent in us all? . . . Being of clean blood myself, I regarded the matter coolly. In fact the ques-

tion is still an open one in my mind." The yellow smile was deep in her eyes when she concluded, vying with the irony that lifted her lip.

Mendall was astounded by her acuteness, and by her audacity. She was laughing at his suspicions, holding them up to ridicule, playing with them. He was also panic-stricken. If angered by his secret surmises, she could revenge herself in disastrous fashion; she might utterly refuse to pose for him.

His fright made him cool. "Nationality interests me merely as an artist, Señorita. Personally all nationalities are much the same to me. . . . In a reincarnation why may not the black man or the red enter into an Anglo-Saxon—or vice versa? In the face of infinite progression, race distinctions appear puerile."

She considered his speech intently for a moment, then dismissed it. "Very clever theories!" she said ironically. Then she pointed to her sketches. "Señor, will I make a great painter?"

"No. You've gone as far as you ever will. I can teach you very little." His answer was incisive; Carl Mendall was always honest where art was concerned.

"I know quite well I will not—I am glad you tell the truth."

Marie rose, and going from one to another of Mendall's paintings, studied them thoughtfully. Before MacAllister had taken away the paintings in the living-room she had often, when not observed, looked at them. The paintings MacAllister had bought were most of them Mendall's earlier work. Mendall had

progressed; even a merely instinctive critic would realize that through various phases Carl Mendall had been groping his way to truest self-expression—a really compelling delineation of the nude. Marie realized it.

She stood some time before the Tehuana. She made no comment, however; she passed on to the naked Indian boy cuddling the snake on his warm knee, one of the best things Mendall had done—and on to Mrs. Bagsby's portrait. For it Marie had only a glance; she spent a longer time before Clare Bagsby's plain-featured likeness. Then to Mendall's consternation she came upon the last thing he had done. He was aghast at the carelessness that had not locked it up. It was still on the easel, but back-turned to the room.

With a quick movement Marie turned it about, and his theft was discovered. It was a jungle-pool, strangled by the giant vegetable growth of the tropics, a sink-hole so festooned and overhung by creepers and greened by water-moss that in the perpetual twilight its black water gleamed apparently a mere threadlike stream in an innocent glade. In reality the soft carpet of moss was a death-net set for the feet of breathing things, a grip that fastened upon and sucked to unsounded depths of slime and ooze. The body it had gripped was only faintly outlined, the water-moss had crept over it, but the face still gleamed duskily yellow; the light ripple of water over it gave a faint semblance of life, as if the wide eyelids occasionally twitched, and the lips parted; as if in her wet grave Marie stirred. For the face was hers, hollowed and thinned by star-

vation, an escaped *enganchada,* the slave of the Isthmus, lost in the jungle. A bit of tattered garment, badge of servility, clung to her shoulders.

Marie looked long and steadfastly at the thing he had dared to do; the insult she must feel he had offered her white blood. Mendall turned hot then cold as he watched her; she had paled until she looked curiously ashen, even her full lips losing their color. . . . Would she strike him before she walked out of his studio never to enter it again? Or would she go cowed? Mendall thought he knew her kind; he waited.

She did neither. She began to speak deliberately, and in English: "You have come through striving, step by step. It is in you to progress. And in following out your purpose you have no fear—it is so with a tremendous ambition. A great ambition has no scruples. You are unscrupulous. . . . But much should be forgiven you—as much should be forgiven me. I also have ambition—" She turned on him swiftly, coming so close that she looked directly into his confused eyes, her own grayed by emotion, whether anger or fear Mendall could not tell. "Señor, you wish to paint me. You long to paint me a great deal?"

Mendall paled, partly from astonishment. "*Yes!*" he said. "I've wanted it from the first moment my eyes lighted on you."

Marie turned away. She was savagely cool now. "Ah, yes, I have guessed that," she said, shrugging. "I have guessed many things. This is a barren place

for an artist. It is ghastly. He starves. He becomes a little mad, because he sees no escape from it. Ah, yes, I understand perfectly."

It was Mendall who came close now. "That is exactly what it is—*ghastly!*" he said passionately. "Señorita, I intended you no insult in that thing!" He touched her hair. "You know—it's the quality of brain this covers that counts—in the end. . . . And you know—you must know—what you mean to an artist. You are one of the wonders! . . . Señorita, the summer is coming, my time of freedom; I can take a long step forward with your help—" Mendall stopped on the beseeching note.

Marie stood with head bent, considering, and he finally touched her arm. "Don't refuse me! It would be like giving water to the thirsty!"

She looked at him, her narrow glance. "If I help you, you know it will have to be in secret?"

"You mean your—that MacAllister would object?"

"I am thinking of your wife, Señor."

"Margaret told me once she would be willing to die if it would make a great artist of me," he said quickly.

Marie smiled. "She was unwise to state her love so clearly, but women sometimes say such things. She might be willing to die, Señor, if it would help you to greatness, but she would endeavor to annihilate any other woman who offered you assistance."

Mendall set the consideration aside impatiently. "Perhaps. You've just said I was unscrupulous.

Where my work's concerned I am. . . . It will be easy enough to keep the thing to ourselves. Margaret never comes here when I am working. Whose business is it any way?"

"It is the business of nobody, of course," Marie said with sarcasm. "It will be quite the proper thing for us to play a part, appear to be antagonistic—as in the past. . . . Señor, like most men, you have a desire and mean to gratify it, even if it leads you—you do not care to think where. . . . And I—why I will pose for you is my affair, alone."

He grasped her meaning instantly. It lay in her sleepily provocative glance—as much as in her words. "And if I did go mad over you, do you think I would paint you any the less well?" he demanded boldly. "You do not know me, Señorita."

"That is a risk you may as well consider," she retorted coolly.

Mendall laughed, even though his flush deepened. "I accept the challenge."

"Bon! It is understood, then!" she added lightly. "We work, not play."

She turned from him with a graceful twist of her body, pirouetted several times aimlessly, then slowed into a dancing step, unwinding as she did so the filmy scarf that draped her shoulders, flung it aloft, dropped it, retreated behind it, emerged from it, and all in time to some subtle rhythm spun in her fertile brain.

She appeared to have been suddenly captured by the spirit of graceful movement. Mendall watched her

in surprise and delight. She bent, circled, lifted and dropped as lightly as blown thistledown, or the gossamer thing she played with, which she lost and recaptured, flung wide and gathered close, the clinging mesh of her russet gown revealing the play of every muscle, every curve, every line, the light swell of her breasts, her clean length of limb—and she moved throughout with features as wrapt and immobile as a sleep-walker's, with eyes half closed and lips parted.

The blood began to pound in Mendall's temples; she was so utterly and completely graceful, a revelation of a thousand poses. Once when she passed him she caught his whispered "God!"

"I play with the wind—out in the meadow there—" she whispered back. "It takes this away, and a-w-a-y —from—me—"

She chased the scarf the length of the studio, recaptured it with infinite grace, and with it held high, with head thrown back to watch its backward sweep, bore down upon Mendall.

He could endure no more. "For God's sake *stand still!* There—as you are now!" he cried, scarlet and hoarse from excitement.

Marie stopped like arrested thistledown, and he plunged toward her. "Can you keep that pose? Five minutes! Ten!"

"Yes," she said.

"My lord! But you are beautiful!" he exclaimed, pausing for a swift survey before dashing for the canvas he had stretched days before.

The blood began to pound in Mendall's temples

Marie laughed, a low note, that was echoed from the doorway. Not even her acute ears had heard the light rap that had been the excuse for Mrs. Bagsby's entrance.

When Mendall whirled, she stood smiling amusedly at them, as if she had been watching for some time. "I am afraid I was not expected," she said.

XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

MRS. BAGSBY came up the studio to them, the long cloak that had covered the gown in which she was being painted trailing behind her. As she approached her blue regard was more for Marie than for Mendall.

"I am sorry I interrupted so alluring a pose," she said significantly, and then she looked at Mendall. "Clare has gone on to Bellevue, and the colored woman told me I should find you here. Perhaps you did not get my note?"

Mendall had forgotten the note the postman had given him that morning. When Marie had said she was ready to begin her lessons, Mrs. Bagsby's coquettishly worded announcement that she had returned from her motor-trip and would be able to give him the morning had fled from his mind. Mendall was more capable than most men of extricating himself from an awkward situation, but, on this occasion, his already flushed face grew dusky; he had so completely forgotten.

It was Marie who answered, and instantly. "But no! We were simply—how is it you say?—'killing

space' until Madame's appearance. In order to divert Monsieur's impatience, I was attempting an interpretation of the spirit of Botticelli's *Allegory of Spring.* Madame has seen the original, of course?"

Mrs. Bagsby knew she was being flouted, and her glance darkened when Marie's soft insolence forced her eyes to shift from Mendall's face. "Oh, yes, I know it very well. I have seen it frequently in Paris," she said coldly.

"But the original is in Florence," Marie murmured, her brows raised in delicate surprise.

Mrs. Bagsby gave her the benefit of a disdainful profile. "I have come prepared, you see," she said in a pleasantly businesslike way to Mendall, as she dropped her cloak and took her pose. "The light is perfect today—I am so glad."

Her shoulders were lovely, the lines of her bust and hips beautiful; as beautiful as her profile. Marie assimilated her perfections with her usual sleepy intentness.

Mendall bent and lifted the cloak, laying it across a chair. He had recovered himself enough to be both amused and angry. The instant antagonism of the two women, and Marie's resourcefulness amused him. He was angry because his studio had been invaded. No one had a right to walk into his studio; it was his sanctuary. And it was Marie he was quivering to paint this morning, not Mrs. Bagsby. He would be unable to paint either of them now, he was so irritated.

But Mendall was accustomed to hiding anger; his nerves were rasped raw most of the time. Marie had saved him an explanation, so he fell back, as he sometimes did, on his New England formality. "Pardon me—the introduction comes a little late I am afraid—Mrs. Bagsby, this is Miss Ogilvie, my latest and most promising pupil."

To Marie's softly ironical, "I am charmed to meet Madame," Mrs. Bagsby inclined carelessly. "It will be some little time before Clare calls for me," she said to Mendall, "so we can have our sitting undisturbed, as usual." It was a dismissal of Marie.

With a man's usual instinct to keep clear of a feminine contest, Mendall left the matter to Marie, and busied himself with placing the portrait. But he almost lost control of his features when he saw Marie's next maneuver. She went to her easel, the task he had set her, and seating herself became absorbed in her drawing; she was not to be eliminated.

Mendall had his foibles, he could not paint with onlookers about. Mrs. Mendall knew his peculiarities and never intruded. Clare Bagsby had discovered that Mendall's annoyance at her presence was not because he wanted a tête-à-tête with her stepmother, that when his art was concerned Mendall was honest. Mendall could not paint with Marie's yellow eyes on him, and had he been in a mood really to work he would have promptly banished her. But the day had been spoiled for him. He could not paint a decent stroke in any case; Marie might have her way for all he cared. He

worked a little on his background and played with unimportant parts of the drapery, silent for the most part.

Mrs. Bagsby flushed from throat to brow when she realized how she was being circumvented. She had come with a purpose: to learn from Mendall all she could about the girl who, chaperoned by his wife, rode so easily in MacAllister's car and ordered silk lingerie with the sang-froid of a princess. Mendall must of course know her, and Mrs. Bagsby had been uneasy while on her motor-trip.

But, until she encountered Marie in the studio, it had not occurred to her that the girl might be staying at the Mendalls'. She felt certain of it now, and there was alarm mingled with her anger, for there was something more than the grasping tendency of the practised coquette in her fancy for Carl Mendall. She was thirty, ennuied by her marriage, secretly bored by her surroundings which she had sifted to the very chaff in her search for diversion. Carl Mendall stirred her. She had gone pretty far; she was tempted to risk even more; she was enjoying her recklessness. She considered herself clever enough to cope with any woman in Laclasse, clever enough to utilize her wide-awake stepdaughter. . . . But this girl?

She talked a good deal to Mendall as he played with palette and colors, a skilful setting forth of her social importance, amused comments on this dinner and that, followed by a sighing confession that she meant to spend the summer in Laclasse with dances at the Coun-

try Club for diversion. She evidently danced much and well, for Mendall's remark was genuinely admiring:

"You dance as naturally and as gracefully as you walk. The innate dancer is not affected by the weather. A little languor, perhaps, but what of that."

"I might say the same of you," she retorted lightly.

He looked across his raised brush at her, the first appreciative glance he had given her since she came in. "It's a form of intoxication."

She smiled at him.

Mendall took up the subject after a time. "I wish you would introduce some of the Spanish dances. The love-challenge is more clearly expressed in them than in the Anglo-Saxon motion to music. I like the coquetry of the Spanish dances, and as they are danced by the half savages of the Isthmus they are marvelous. We can't do it as they can. If you've ever watched negroes dance you'll know what I mean; there is both verve and subtlety in their dance-expression. The nearer we get to the savage the more perfectly expressed is the love-challenge; and after all it's the love-call that underlies all motion to music—even the so-called religious dances."

Mrs. Bagsby laughed softly. "You are right, of course, though Laclasse would be shocked at your views."

"I don't state them to Laclasse."

"Nor do I advertise my convictions." She sighed wearily: "Oh, Laclasse!"

There was an intensity of contempt in Mendall's reply. "It's in the middle-western town that the Puritanism which makes a hypocrite, more or less, of every American, really flourishes. It's been pushed out of the East by Southern European ideas—which are anything but Puritanical—and trekked westward, but never really reached the Pacific Coast. It was scared by the wide expanse of nature. It got lost in the sands of the desert. It lodged in the middle-western town, a residue that mingles funnily with bald commercialism and an entire lack of subtlety."

"How well you express the things I have only dared think," his sitter said, her violet eyes grown wide and wistful.

Marie smiled slightly. Mrs. Bagsby's tactics appeared to entertain her. The look Marie surreptitiously bestowed on her was much the same watchful consideration a tiger would give a panther. Mendall she studied thoughtfully, his youthful erectness, his clean-cut features, his black hair, dusky tinting, and arrogant lips.

She smiled again to herself. Her expression said: "The woman is a fool!"

XXIV

MARIE SCORES

IT was at this juncture the honk of a car announced Clare Bagsby's return. As a general thing she was kept waiting, a space she usually utilized for conversation with Mrs. Mendall. This morning Mendall put down his palette promptly. He hated to play over his work.

"Margaret is not here," he said. "I'll bring Miss Bagsby in."

Mrs. Bagsby was left to don her cloak and glance frequently in Marie's direction. Marie continued to handle her pencil deftly, oblivious of her presence.

But Mrs. Bagsby was not easily daunted. She wanted information. "I suppose you felt the shock of the explosion very severely here, the other night. It was an outrageous thing, wasn't it? Mr. MacAllister has every one's sympathy—except, of course, the pro-Germans."

"Are you pro-German, Madame?"

Mrs. Bagsby had intended to be answered, not questioned. "Oh, indeed I am not! . . . Are you staying here, with the Mendalls, Miss Ogilvie?"

Marie did not look up. *"Oui."*

"For some time?"

"Indefinitely."

"You are a relation of Mr. MacAllister's, I suppose —your name is Scotch."

Marie answered in French. "Doubtless Adam and Eve were responsible for us both, Madame."

Mrs. Bagsby was silenced. She knew the girl was speaking French purposely to confuse her, and the look she bestowed on Mendall's busy pupil was not an affectionate one. Clare Bagsby when she came in caught the look and observed its direction; her stepmother's smile was not assumed quickly enough.

"I was prepared for a wait," Clare said breezily. "You are punctual this morning, Blanche; we shall actually get back in time for lunch. . . . Hello! I haven't seen the portrait for ages—it's about done, isn't it?"

Marie lowered her pencil and looked at the newcomer. She had swept into the studio, a tall girl, square-shouldered, long-limbed and long-waisted, thin as a boy and as erect as an athlete. She was certainly not beautiful, and yet, in spite of her long face and muzzle-like formation of jaw, she was not ugly; she looked too thoroughly alive. Her skin was clear, her eyes dark and bright, and when she smiled, which was often, she showed a row of beautifully even white teeth. At forty she would be a stately woman; at twenty-one she was wholesomely virginal. Perhaps the most pronounced thing about Clare Bagsby was the atmosphere of *cleanness* that enveloped her.

Marie's acute sense felt it; she looked narrowly

and smilelessly at this girl whose experience of life—whatever her age might be—would total no such sum as her own. And yet, in spite of her thoughts, possibly because of them, when Mendall introduced her, Marie rose and offered her hand.

"I have looked with admiration at Mr. Mendall's painting of you," she said, in her thick rich tones. "I am glad now I see the whole," and with her free hand she made a little gesture comprehensive of Clare's entire personality. Marie's astonishing graciousness was utterly foreign in expression, and indescribably graceful.

Mendall's eyes widened slightly, and Clare looked pleased. "You can say beautiful things—beautifully," she said somewhat bruskly. "What are you doing—a bit of still-life?"

"A little task my teacher has given me. It is so long since I have drawn—I do it as if with my feet."

Clare laughed. "I wish I could do as well with mine! Mr. Mendall gave me up long ago."

"He is a severe teacher, is he not?" The assumption of anxiety was so well done that both Clare and Mendall laughed.

"If you can draw as easily as you choose expensive clothes, Laclasse'll welcome you as a genius," Clare said significantly. "I saw and heard you the other day, though you didn't see me."

"Ah, yes, I saw you from the back of my head—I see many things from the back of my head."

Clare nodded amusedly. "I bet you do. Have you come to this part of the world to stay?"

"I hope I may."

Mrs. Bagsby had been thinking unpleasantly as she looked on. This girl would capture Laclasse if given the opportunity. There was nothing to be gained by open enmity, so on her way to the door she inserted her word. "Miss Ogilvie is visiting Mr. and Mrs. Mendall, Clare. Perhaps if we call for her some morning she would like to see the boulevard. We really have a nice boulevard system, Miss Ogilvie." As usual Mrs. Bagsby was utilizing her stepdaughter.

Marie did not wait for Clare's seconding. Her yellow gaze fastened upon Mrs. Bagsby. "Madame is very kind, but I do not ride in the mornings—my time will be given to this," and she pointed to her drawing. Then with shoulder to Mrs. Bagsby she proffered an invitation to Clare. "When Madame is absorbed by her portrait and you wait without, perhaps you will walk up the hill with me. It is as well to enjoy one's self at the same time that one is useful."

The coolness with which Marie expressed her understanding of a situation that must have its trials for Clare was cruel in its astuteness. Mendall smiled slightly, and Mrs. Bagsby grew crimson.

Clare flushed, hesitated, then resolutely accepted. "All right, we'll do that some time."

"I look forward then to a pleasure."

Mrs. Bagsby was silent until seated in her car. But

as Mendall arranged the robe about her knees, she looked into his eyes, the look that tells a man his way is clear; that the little barriers prudence, or coquetry, or fear have erected are down; the look of surrender. She had grown a little pale, and tight-lipped.

Mendall looked after the beckoning plume in her hat as long as it was in sight. His face had become expressionless.

Then he turned and hurried back into the studio. But Marie had fled. She did not appear at lunch-time —nor did Mrs. Mendall.

XXV

UNEASE

AFTER leaving the Mendalls' door Mrs. Bagsby and Clare rode in silence for a time. Clare guessed what was passing in her stepmother's mind, for she had an exceedingly accurate knowledge of the combination of cleverness, slyness, vanity and folly that was Blanche Bagsby.

Her stepmother was one of the few people with whom Clare used finesse. It was a necessity Clare hated. What it was costing her to watch over her father's interests no one but Clare knew. The task was too much for her patience sometimes. To be told by a mere stranger that she was being used as a cover to a flirtation was not pleasant; Clare was hot with irritation which she felt she must not show.

Clare was also anxiously wondering what effect Marie's appearance would have upon her stepmother's affair with Carl Mendall. If it would harmlessly terminate it, she would be endlessly grateful to Marie Ogilvie. . . . But that was not likely. Her stepmother had been uneasy ever since they had seen Marie with Mrs. Mendall, and now she was furious. Anger and affronted vanity might drive her to do something dangerously sly. Clare knew that Blanche Bagsby

was capable of resorting to underhand methods. It would depend then largely on Carl Mendall how far she would go, and he was an uncertain quantity. Most men would be unreliable under such circumstances. For weeks Clare had been in a quandary; secretly anxious, and doubtful how best to protect her father. Now she was really alarmed.

When Mrs. Bagsby spoke it was of Marie. If they had not both been thinking of her the remark would have appeared unwarrantably abrupt. "That queer creature is some connection of Alexander MacAllister's, Clare."

"Did she say so?" Clare asked.

"No, but she jabbered in French when I asked her; it was her way of avoiding an answer."

"And of telling you to mind your own business," was Clare's thought, but she did not say so. Still a little of her secret irritation crept into her answer: "I don't see that it's our affair, Blanche."

Mrs. Bagsby was instantly on her guard. "It isn't, of course," she said, laughing, "though you must grant she is a queer thing. I wonder what Mrs. Mendall thinks of her."

Clare thought it best to say: "I'm sorry for the Mendalls if she is their visitor. They're too poor to enjoy an extravagant girl like that. It must be no end of bother."

"She must have money—buying clothes as she did."

"If she has, and is related to Mr. MacAllister, she'll be meeting people in Laclasse, Blanche, and we'll hear

all about her—and more—so why bother ourselves wondering. . . . What time is it?"

Mrs. Bagsby consulted her wrist-watch, a diamond-set jewel which she wore with easy grace. As Blanche Eckart, Mrs. Bagsby had not indulged in such extravagances; her father's cashiership in a secondary Boston bank did not allow of lavish expenditure. That, however, had not deterred his daughter from extracting every penny she could from him for her personal adornment, while she watched for her opportunity. Marrying Frederick Bagsby meant that she must live in the West, but he had a considerable fortune, and nothing else worth taking had offered. And she was twenty-six. To Frederick Bagsby himself she had given less consideration than to anything else.

Clare had her thoughts as she watched her stepmother's leisurely examination of her watch. She had long ago forgiven her father his error in judgment. Her "poor Dad!" What chance had he had against such a combination of circumstances—and such a profile. When tempted to weep, Clare usually laughed; when angered by it all she held her peace. It was the future that made her anxious, for her stepmother was a confirmed poseur, and, as is usual with those who systematically play a part, she was liable to moments of abandon.

"It's fifteen minutes of one," Mrs. Bagsby announced.

"Good! We'll stop for father then, and take him home for lunch. I'll persuade him to go out to the

Country Club for golf this afternoon. You come out and have tea with us, Blanche."

"The middle of the week! There would be nobody there to-day, Clare."

"We'd be there—Dad would enjoy it."

"He won't go—he is too busy to-day. He has a school board meeting after the bank closes."

"We can get him for lunch, anyway."

Her stepmother was not enthusiastic. "He is sure to be going to lunch with some man."

"He ought to come home and rest till the meeting," Clare persisted. "He is tired out; he hasn't looked a bit well this spring."

"It's this miserable climate!" Mrs. Bagsby asserted, a trifle sharply. "When the heat begins it is enough to take the life out of even a native."

Clare said no more, but she thought hotly that nothing could be sweeter than the May breeze that warmed their cheeks. She loved the clean breath of the prairie, even when it came pantingly, heated by the midsummer sun. It was the breath of Nebraska; *her* state, and her father's before her. There was something fundamentally wrong with the creature who would complain of a day like this; there was the scent of fallen cherry blooms in the air, and sprouting corn, and young alfalfa. It was rank ingratitude to fruitful nature. But what could you expect of a woman who, though possessing every comfort, was secretly seething with discontent?

But she said nothing until Mrs. Bagsby suggested:

"Clare, I think it would be delightful to close the season with a costume dance at the club. To make it original some of us might learn one or two of the Spanish dances—as a special feature, I mean; a sort of exhibition dance."

"In this awful heat!" Clare could not help retorting. "You would be too overcome to dance, Blanche."

Mrs. Bagsby fell back upon her soft laugh. "How ridiculous you are. I didn't mean to be scornful of your beloved Middle West! . . . What do you say, Clare? Six of us might learn the fandango—you and I and—Elizabeth Nast—she dances well. . . . Then for the men—Ellis Kraup, of course, and Harmon Kent—they're the most graceful men dancers—and some other man. If we could find some one who knows the Spanish dances it would be perfect—he could coach us. Several of the men here have lived in Mexico."

Clare reflected that Blanche's tactics were sometimes a little like those of the ostrich. She knew instantly whom she had in mind for "the other man." Clare had not heard Mendall's eulogy of the Spanish dances, but it was plain to Clare that her stepmother was intending to do exactly what Clare had feared: tighten her hold on Carl Mendall; vanquish the newcomer. She would see to it that Marie Ogilvie was not invited to her dance, and, if she could, she would exclude Mrs. Mendall also; she was playing a dangerous game.

"There is Alexander MacAllister—he has lived in Mexico," Clare suggested calmly.

Mrs. Bagsby rippled into laughter. "Clare! The

look Mr. MacAllister would give any one who proposed such a thing! Blue steel would stab more gently! . . . But we can settle on the other man later—don't you think it would be fun?"

"I don't think it would be worth the bother, Blanche. As for me—no fandango for mine!"

"Nonsense, Clare! You'll change your mind when the time comes. I believe it would be a success; I believe I'll do it," Mrs. Bagsby said with soft enthusiasm.

Clare knew if her stepmother willed to give the dance she would give it, and that it would be a success. She was considered one of the best entertainers in Laclasse, and though not loved, was deferred to. She was so refined; so eastern; so exquisitely critical. She mourned the lack of culture in Laclasse. As a bride she had immediately taken the lead in all the improvement clubs. She had worked—gracefully—for woman's suffrage.

But withal Blanche was a fool, Clare reflected scornfully. Her conceit kept her from realizing that there were many in Laclasse who understood her perfectly. Did she think she could live three years in the same house with any fairly intelligent woman and not be discovered! It was a constant irritation to Clare that her stepmother took it for granted that she as well as the rest of Laclasse was blind to her affair with Carl Mendall. And yet it seemed best not to enlighten her. Why was it that so many clever women made fools of themselves over men?

Clare sighed inwardly, while she continued to discourage her stepmother. "I wouldn't undertake it," she advised. "Everything you've pushed this winter has gone swimmingly. I wouldn't risk ending the season with something that may be a failure."

Mrs. Bagsby yielded too easily. "Perhaps you are right," she conceded, and talked of other things. It was a bad sign; Clare knew now that if humanly possible the dance would be given.

XXVI

MAC ALLISTER GETS HIS WAY

TWENTY minutes later, as MacAllister came down the steps of the Laclasse National Bank, he saw Mrs. Bagsby and Clare going up Broad Street in their car. His frown deepened as he looked after them, for he guessed where they had been. He had just been talking to Bagsby, and in the Mendalls' behalf, for he had learned that morning that the school board intended to drop Carl Mendall.

But Bagsby had been obdurate, and MacAllister understood perfectly the reason. Mrs. Bagsby was evidently determined to go her own way and carry her stepdaughter with her, and Bagsby had hit upon this means of ridding himself of Carl Mendall; the young man would be forced to seek employment elsewhere.

MacAllister had been thoroughly irritated by Bagsby's stubbornness, and not merely because of self-interest. He considered that Bagsby would be doing the worst possible thing for himself. Mrs. Bagsby's flirtation with Carl Mendall was only whispered gossip so far, but if Bagsby turned his back on Mendall the result might be an actual scandal. Still, one couldn't offer a man advice regarding his wife. Some one ought to take Mrs. Bagsby in hand, and decidedly. A

man who had reached Bagsby's age and married a young wife was a fool! MacAllister looked after the Bagsbys' car with no pleasant expression.

Suddenly his face changed. Just before him on the corner was Mrs. Mendall, gowned in neatly starched white and with brows drawn in perplexity. She was looking down Sixteenth, evidently consulting the clock in the post-office tower.

MacAllister paused beside her. "Are ye just helping the day to look spring-like, Mrs. Mendall, or are ye about business like the rest of Laclasse?" he inquired quizzically.

She turned in surprise. "Oh, Mr. MacAllister! No, I see I have missed my car. I was wondering what to do."

"Ye've missed the one o'clock Bellevue car, certainly, and yer lunch with it, I presume."

"I am afraid I have."

"Weel, can't yer family eat luncheon without ye for once?"

"They can, of course, but I ought to be there," she said anxiously.

Though in a particularly bad humor, MacAllister was amused. He had given Mrs. Mendall and her difficulties some thought. She interested him. Married to such a man as—Bagsby, for instance—she would go through life smoothly enough; she would certainly be a tender and devoted mother. But she was married to Carl Mendall and there was trouble ahead for her. Mendall was by nature an amatory wanderer.

She knew it, and was deeply jealous. Hers was a possessive love; MacAllister judged that she would fight to the finish for what was hers.

He had also wondered why she disliked him. He was aware that many people criticized him; that he was considered too Bohemian—to put it mildly—and that his long intimacy with Freda O'Rourke, in particular, had won him an ill-name. He had cared very little what Laclasse thought of his uneconventionalities, but his friendship for Freda O'Rourke was a matter that had always touched him closely. He had decided that Mrs. Mendall's New England primness had been offended by the gossip she had heard. He was tempted to test her. It mattered a good deal to him in what light he was presented to Marie.

He regarded her gravely. "Yer household may quarrel in yer absence, ye think?"

Mrs. Mendall felt uncomfortable. Possibly Marie had told him that Mendall treated her with scant courtesy. "Oh, no," she protested. "It's just that I promised to be back. I shall wait the next half-hour somewhere," and she began to walk aimlessly up the street.

MacAllister kept by her side. Two of her short steps scarcely equaled his stride; she was so pretty and petite that frequently she reminded him of a dignified child. Suddenly she began to walk in her usual alert fashion. "I can't get back, so why worry. I'll go on to the library and wait there."

"And how about yer lunch?" MacAllister asked. "I'm afraid, Mrs. Mendall, ye've caught the universal

fever—that ye're pondering 'Economic Freedom for Woman' and such like? I've seen ye several times—I saw ye this morning—hurrying into the business school just this side of our stately public library. What is it has been so absorbing ye there that ye forgot about yer family, and even yer lunch?"

Mrs. Mendall flushed scarlet. She had not told any one why she came into Laclasse so frequently. Her little venture was an experiment she had kept to herself. And she did not like MacAllister's faintly teasing manner. It offended her dignity. Their attitude to each other had always been mutually complimentary. If she were not in a way beholden to him, she would have frozen him.

She managed to smile, however. "I am learning stenography, and not finding it very easy," she confessed. "My mother, if she knew of it, would think it dreadful. But women seem to be learning to do all sorts of things." It was all the explanation she meant to make.

MacAllister understood perfectly. He judged that, if necessary, she would not hesitate to become the bread-winner of the family. She certainly loved her husband enough to do it. She was not of the "emancipated" order, however. Every thought she had seemed to circle about her husband. A little broadening would not hurt her. She was evidently given to prejudices. She made her own little universe and lived within it.

"There are plenty of women in Laclasse who are

doing for themselves," he remarked. "I should think ye'd enjoy talking with a few of them. Ye see, Mrs. Mendall, I sometimes attend a suffrage meeting. I was a bit sorry when the election went against the women. I'll confess it was plain curiosity possessed me in the beginning, just as it was curiosity tuke me to labor meetings. For fifteen years I've watched every eruption in this state, political, religious, or psychical —it's only a fool who doesn't—and I assure ye this gathering together of the women for a purpose impressed me. I can't say I liked the manner or the methods of some of the ladies who had their say regarding equal rights, the double standard, economic independence, and the like, but just as soon as it got fixed in my mind that for a revolution ye've got to have officers and soldiers and politicians, and a certain number of cranks and pretenders and busybodies generally, I got down to the fact that, whether I liked it or not, something of permanent and radical importance was doing in the feminine world. . . . What do ye think of it all, Mrs. Mendall?"

"I really know very little about it." She spoke with a slight deepening of her usual aloofness, with a touch of distaste as well.

It was exactly the sort of answer MacAllister had expected. He had merely been filling in time. They were approaching the library now.

"Are ye actually proposing to wait till the middle of the afternoon for yer lunch?" he asked.

"Yes, I shan't mind."

Mrs. Mendall was glad they were nearing the end of their walk. She had thought every moment that he would leave her, but he had come on, past the handsome new court-house, past the business school, evidently bent upon accompanying her to the very steps of the library which he had sarcastically designated as "stately." The building looked as if it had been erected by the city in a mild fit of concern over its good name, and then left to languish on a meager appropriation; as if it apologized to every one who entered its door in quest of volumes it did not possess. Mrs. Mendall hoped MacAllister did not intend to go in with her.

She dismissed him with her most dimpled smile. "I must say good-by here. I suppose you are coming out to see Marie to-day. She is taking her first drawing lesson this morning, and Carl told me before I left that she could draw exceedingly well."

It had struck Mrs. Mendall that MacAllister looked harassed; grimmer than usual, and in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. The loss of his plant certainly must have been a trial, and from several little indications, an added concern over Marie that she had noticed in the last few days, she had judged that he was more than usually troubled over his daughter. She purposely gave him her husband's good opinion of Marie, and was promptly rewarded by seeing his face brighten.

"Eh, is that so! Weel, I'm glad to hear it."

"Good health is making a wonderful change in her.

I think most people would call her beautiful," Mrs. Mendall continued generously.

MacAllister himself had called Marie beautiful, so she did not know what to make of his sudden frown. "Yes, she's beautiful," he returned shortly. "We can't help that."

He looked down, scowling, and his eye fell upon a beetle that was scuttling across the hot step. For a moment Mrs. Mendall thought he was going to put his foot on it; she judged it was the sort of thing MacAllister would do. But if such was his intention he changed his mind. He bent and with elaborate care placed it on the meager grass-plot that edged the asphalt.

"That's a safer road for ye to travel, see that ye keep to it," he said with scornful emphasis. "Dementit old body—getting yer feet burned adventuring round on hot stone! . . . Ye show about as much sense as a middle-aged man who's thinking of getting himself a young wife!"

The exclamation seemed to free his mind of irritation, for when he looked up his expression was more pleasant. "Mrs. Mendall, I'm not minded to say good-by to ye yet. Just come a step this way till I show ye something."

Mrs. Mendall followed him to the corner, wondering. He pointed out, on the next street, a roof that was almost hidden by tall trees. "Ye see that old house? That's the old O'Rourke place. I don't know if ye know, but there're two sisters live there who in

their youth heard none of all this talk of economic independence, so when O'Rourke, after mortgaging everything he possessed, took to his bed with a stroke, they were about to starve. O'Rourke was a graceless old gallant, by the way, and fonder of whisky and gay ladies than he was of his daughters—the kind of gentlemen they used to grow sometimes in the South. . . . Weel, when things were at the worst and the two ladies were distractedly wondering whether they could run a typewriter or stand in a store, the mortgagee—not for sentimental reasons, mind ye, but out of honest respect for the ladies, and with the intention of holding the property till it trebled in value and getting rent for it in the meantime—this man suggested to the Misses O'Rourke that they had a talent they had overlooked: that they could cook. That they could let out part of the old house, and take a few table boarders. For a number of years I rented their upper floor.

"Weel, now, to come to the point: they set a table for a few who, like myself, appreciate real fried chicken with real cream gravy and rice to grace it. They make a confection called 'corn-pone,' and their baked sweet potatoes come straight from a hot oven. . . . Will ye honor me, Mrs. Mendall, by stepping over there with me for a bit of lunch?"

Mrs. Mendall was completely surprised. She had heard the gossip that circled about the youngest Miss O'Rourke and Alexander MacAllister: that MacAllister had taken advantage of O'Rourke and then annexed his daughter. She had considered it aloofly.

If Miss O'Rourke had laid herself open to criticism, it was Miss O'Rourke's affair, not hers. Margaret Mendall had long ago taken that step away from the Puritan intolerance upon which she had been reared.

But that same aloofness made her think with distaste of possibly meeting Freda O'Rourke, and in spite of the fact that while MacAllister had been giving her the O'Rourke history she had had an intense feeling of pity for Miss O'Rourke. It had occurred to Margaret Mendall that every morning, while she awkwardly punctuated a typewriter and essayed shorthand in a class composed of young girls far more apt than she, that the middle-aged woman who had been trained to no profession but the supervision of a household was sadly handicapped when brought face to face with some of life's problems. It was that realization which had led her to do just what she had been doing for the last two weeks—secretly prepare herself for contingencies. . . . But that was no reason why she should enter Freda O'Rourke's house.

Mrs. Mendall had swiftly decided upon a tactful excuse, but when she looked up, with the disarming dimple deep in her cheek, she as swiftly substituted an acceptance. "Thank you, Mr. MacAllister, I shall be glad to lunch with you."

She had decided instantly. During his long preamble, MacAllister had stood with hat solidly crowning his shock of sandy hair, but at the finale he had taken it off with an air curiously old-fashioned and deferential; his manner was not without charm. But

it was not his manner that decided Mrs. Mendall. It was his expression; the compelling steadiness of his eyes. He meant that, reluctant or not, she should come. It would be the height of unwisdom to refuse.

MacAllister resumed his hat. "We'll just step over there then—out of the sun," he said quietly.

XXVII

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PROCEDURE

THE O'Rourke home was a distinct surprise to Mrs. Mendall.

She had never been on this street that was given over to unkempt houses placarded with signs of "furnished rooms." Only a few years before this had been one of the beautiful residence streets of the city. But the expansion of the business section had rapidly changed its character. The old families had flown westward—with the exception of the O'Rourkes and possibly one or two others.

Yet in spite of its surroundings the O'Rourke place retained its gentility. It occupied nearly a quarter of a block, and was distinguished by the most beautiful trees Mrs. Mendall had yet seen in Laclasse—tall elms that reminded her of her own New England town. The house stood high above the street on one of the natural knolls that had abounded in Laclasse before the leveling process had deprived the town of one of its distinguishing characteristics. It was almost hidden from the street by a thick hedge and shrubbery, and was approached by a zigzag flight of stone steps. When MacAllister had assisted her up the steps, Mrs. Mendall saw with delight that the terraces and sunken

garden below were natural inequalities made beautiful. There was a bright flower garden in the hollow in which flamed many of her favorites.

And the house with its steep gables, high narrow windows and paintless aspect stirred her to homesickness. There was plenty of honeysuckle nestled against its old-fashioned boarding. The house was old, very old for Laclasse, approaching decrepitude; but it had such a familiar face, and all about were the equally familiar indications of loving care; not a gardener's care—a woman's care. Mrs. Mendall forgot her annoyance at being forced into Freda O'Rourke's house. "What a beautiful old place!" she exclaimed. And on reaching the porch with its pent roof, she stopped again to admire. "We look right over all that ugliness in the street below, straight into the heart of the city!"

"I was thinking ye'd like it," MacAllister said, with his rare look of satisfaction. "Miss Freda's a great lover of flowers."

The mention of Miss O'Rourke reminded Mrs. Mendall that she was doing an unconventional thing. Freda O'Rourke was not considered beyond the pale; she was simply regarded doubtfully. Laclasse society passed her by on the other side, but that was mainly because she no longer had the money to attract them. Still it was hardly the thing for her to lunch alone with Alexander MacAllister and, of all odd places, in Freda O'Rourke's house. But she could not afford to offend MacAllister. And, after all, what harm could the experience do her?

So Mrs. Mendall courageously followed MacAllister into a wide hall which was as unmodern as the outside of the house. But it was exquisitely neat, and there were flowers and greenery at the windows. On the right was a room with many books and a spacious desk-table, the O'Rourke sisters' living-room probably. The room into which MacAllister brought her, Mrs. Mendall guessed, had been the O'Rourke drawing-room. It and the room connected with it were set with tables. Though courageous, Mrs. Mendall was relieved to find that there was no one lunching in either of the rooms. A colored waitress in snowy white was clearing the tables.

In the bay window to which MacAllister led her was a table set for one, and with the accomplished housekeeper's eye for such details, Mrs. Mendall noticed that its linen was spotless and of good quality. The silver also was good.

"My luncheon's ordered, Celia," MacAllister said to the waitress. "I'm a bit late, but Miss O'Rourke'll forgive that. Just ye set another place here, now, and don't ye forget my bottle of Scotch and the seltzer."

Their lunch was brought promptly: some cool fruit, and then the fried chicken of which MacAllister had spoken. He had not praised Miss O'Rourke's cooking unduly; the chicken was delicious, the rice was snowy, and the corn-pone, a new experience to Mrs. Mendall, was very good.

"How beautifully everything is prepared," Mrs. Mendall remarked.

MacAllister knew perfectly well what had been passing in her mind. She was making the best of what she considered an unconventional situation, too completely fortified by her own aloofness even to indulge in criticism. It was women such as she who made life difficult for Freda O'Rourke.

MacAllister liked Mrs. Mendall; she had sterling qualities, and she was a good little fighter, but it was his opinion that Freda could teach this little New Englander the A B C of real womanliness. Even Marie, girl though she was, had shown a broader understanding. It was perfectly plain that Mrs. Mendall had heard all Laclasse had to say about Freda and himself, and that she sat with skirts well drawn away from it all. MacAllister was taking a certain sardonic satisfaction in his venture.

"Will ye have a bit of Scotch with me, Mrs. Mendall?" he asked gravely.

"No, thank you," she said with precision.

"Ye don't smoke, either?"

"No, thank you."

"Yer right—it's an abominable habit. But may I?"

Mrs. Mendall's well-marked brows lifted. She did not like his faintly teasing manner. "Why, certainly. I have no objection to anybody's smoking—man or woman—if they wish to do so."

"That's your attitude to life in general, isn't it, Mrs. Mendall? What doesn't touch ye doesn't matter particularly."

Mrs. Mendall was surprised. She had not supposed

that MacAllister had troubled to analyze her. "Perhaps." She dimpled into a smile. "I think I am about as set in my ways as you are."

MacAllister surprised her again. "So ye think I'm hard, do ye?" he asked shrewdly.

"I didn't know *I* was," she returned brightly. She could not imagine why MacAllister had been so determined to secure her society, but, whatever his reason, she intended that the luncheon hour should pass smoothly.

He chose to be sardonically serious. "I hope ye'll never have my reputation, Mrs. Mendall. As ye know, Laclasse has no very good opinion of me. I'll grant I have a nasty temper, but they say a deal worse of me: that I'm hard as steel and as cold as stone; that I drive a close bargain with man or woman; that I've got no morals to speak of; that I'll even take advantage of a woman. . . . That's a pretty reputation to have, isn't it?"

Mrs. Mendall thought that in the main Laclasse was right. But she had seen a saving grace, and her tact instantly put it forward. "They have never seen you with Marie, as I have, or they would alter their view," she said prettily.

She appeared to have touched a sensitive nerve. "Thank God, Marie's got no such opinion of me!" he said with genuine feeling. He flushed as warmly as any lover. "I'll tell ye the reason the town's got such an opinion, Mrs. Mendall: it's just that any man who carries about with him hurt and regret and the like is

not good company. I've got no great liking for people; if ye don't like people they don't like ye—that's common law. And, in addition, I've made my money by fighting, not praying. If ye fight, somebody's like to get hurt. Every man who makes a million has a certain reputation handed to him; it was decided long ago that he could never pass through the eye of a needle. Some of us kick against the pricks—I've always thought best to take it quietly. If I ever did a good deed, I did it on the sly."

Mrs. Mendall felt that she was skating over rather thin ice. She chose a safe topic. "I have been struck by Marie's accurate judgment of people. I think she is very keen in some ways."

MacAllister was instantly diverted. "She has plenty of character," he said decidedly. Then he remarked with customary unexpectedness: "I've gathered that yer husband has no liking for the pupil I've put upon him."

Mrs. Mendall flushed brightly. Still, there was no use trying to palliate the fact. "Carl has his peculiarities—he likes very few people. But he would never be anything but polite to Marie. And he is a conscientious teacher; he will not neglect her drawing lessons." She spoke with no little dignity.

MacAllister was satisfied by the genuineness of her speech. He was secretly relieved. When he had placed Marie with the Mendalls he had given no thought to Carl Mendall. But of late he had been uneasy; Mendall was an attractive young fellow. Marie had given

him her opinion of Mendall; he wanted to be assured that Mendall had no liking for Marie; a jealously inclined woman like Mrs. Mendall was not likely to be deceived. One reason he had brought Mrs. Mendall to lunch with him was to probe her on this point.

There were several other things he wanted to know, so he continued. "Your husband certainly has talent; he has a right to a few peculiarities. . . . I met Mrs. Bagsby coming back up Broad Street this noon—I judged from a sitting. Is her portrait nearly finished?" MacAllister was thinking that if he could do nothing with Bagsby in the school matter, he could at least persuade him to pay well for the portrait.

"Yes. And I think people will like it. She is a graceful subject," Mrs. Mendall said, with the proper degree of enthusiasm.

"She's a particularly well-featured woman."

"She is beautiful," Mrs. Mendall answered, in the same well-poised way. "I wish Carl had the opportunity to paint more portraits."

"If there were more of Mrs. Bagsby's brand of vanity about, he would not lack for sitters," MacAllister returned dryly. "That was a foolish marriage of Bagsby's, if ever there was one. . . . He's twenty years her senior," he added, as if Bagsby's mistake touched him personally. His face had clouded, as it had when he had rebuked the beetle.

"It could hardly be called a wise marriage," Mrs. Mendall returned equably, though she had begun to pale. She had a sudden jealous certainty that Mrs.

Bagsby had been to her house during her absence. Her husband must have known she was coming, and he had not told her. MacAllister evidently knew how matters stood—perhaps he thought he was doing her a kindness by telling her.

"There's a deal of unwisdom perpetrated in the name of marriage," MacAllister continued gloomily. "I have little use for the institution."

The hurt she was feeling made Mrs. Mendall a little sharp. "I don't believe it. I think you have a tremendous respect for the 'institution,' as you call it. You are simply a good deal afraid of it."

MacAllister eyed her keenly. "And ye're not a trifle appalled by it occasionally? I should think anybody who's married would be."

"No. But like any other venture, it has to be handled sensibly. In a business venture you always make allowance for contingencies, don't you? You safeguard your venture? You put up a good fight? Well, marriage is full of contingencies—no venture more so." The thought of Mrs. Bagsby always made Mrs. Mendall want to fight.

MacAllister's brows lifted. Her answer interested him. "So that is yer view of marriage, is it? . . . Weel, I'm not one of those who takes the attitude toward marriage of 'nothing ventured nothing gained.'"

"Perhaps experience has made you cautious."

It slipped out before she thought, and for a moment she was terrified at her plain reference to his early

marriage. She saw his face change; he looked down. But his answer, when it came, was curiously subdued:

"Experience counts awfu' little against desire."

He appeared to be pondering some immediate difficulty, and not his early tragedy.

XXVIII

THE QUESTIONABLE WOMAN

MRS. MENDALL and MacAllister were interrupted at this moment.

A woman had come into the room, silently and swiftly, pausing when she saw them; a tall woman, well-formed and becomingly gowned. In spite of her abundance of snow-white hair, she was certainly not forty. Her unlined face had warm tints, color in lips and cheeks, a sweep of black brows above dark eyes. Her eyes were dominant, her mouth firm, a woman of arresting personality. Mrs. Mendall had never seen Freda O'Rourke, yet she knew at once that this was she.

MacAllister turned quickly. "Freda!" he said, rising. "I was intending to ask for ye—I'm glad ye happened in. Ye're two ladies should know each other. Mrs. Mendall, ye've heard me speak of Miss Freda O'Rourke."

Miss O'Rourke came forward and offered her hand. She did not smile; Mrs. Mendall received the impression that she rarely smiled. Though her manner was grave, it was also gracious. "I am certainly glad to

meet you, Mrs. Mendall. . . . Has Celia served you as she should? You are later than usual, Alex."

Her dark eyes had swept Mrs. Mendall, then rested on him, and to Mrs. Mendall there was something quietly possessive in her manner.

"We've been so well served that we've sat a bit over our coffee, having fallen upon the subject of greatest import in the universe—marriage. Ye are a feminist and a bit of a superwoman, Freda; ye have decided views on the subject: ye should have been here, for both Mrs. Mendall and I need enlightenment on the subject."

MacAllister's delivery was dry. Freda O'Rourke studied him gravely. A long and intimate acquaintance with Alexander MacAllister had taught her his moods; to-day he was at his worst; he had been at his worst for several days. It was not simply worry over the plant that made him restless and irritable. She knew what had set him to talking about marriage. His mind was on the subject these days to the exclusion of almost everything else.

She made no reply, and MacAllister continued: "Mrs. Mendall, here, regards marriage as a venture to which one should apply business methods. Ye, Freda, consider the combination of friendship and the usual attraction as the only safe basis for the contract. Ye are in favor of careful consideration before marriage, and a dissolution of the contract in case of incompatibility. Ye are an individualist. Mrs. Mendall's is the

'to have and to hold' idea—to have and to hold in spite of everything. . . . Now, which of us all is right?"

"I don't see that you have made clear what your attitude is," Freda said.

"Mrs. Mendall will tell ye—she has just told me: that I'm afraid of marriage—to the point of cowardice."

"We are none of us right, probably," Mrs. Mendall said; "so we won't talk about it. . . . It is time I went home."

She rose and gathered up her gloves and hand-bag. In spite of Freda O'Rourke's very evident charm, she shrank from any but the most casual speech with her. Mrs. Mendall had all of the possessively jealous woman's distrust of a woman with undoubted physical attraction. She had not wanted to believe the gossip she had heard, but Freda's beauty combined with her avowedly advanced ideas left no room for doubt; she and MacAllister knew each other well. Laclasse was right.

Freda O'Rourke had been studying her, and now she smiled. "I am afraid Mrs. Mendall would be prejudiced against anything I might say on the subject." There was a touch of mockery in her eyes.

Inwardly Mrs. Mendall was taken aback. Miss O'Rourke was evidently a good observer. She did not know that her uncontrollable shrinking had been apparent. MacAllister also was watching her from beneath his heavy brows. "I am afraid I am thinking

more of my forsaken family than I am of how the world should marry," she declared brightly. "Mr. MacAllister, I hope you have not allowed me to miss my car?"

"I have. I thought it a deal better for ye to eat yer lunch in leisure, and then let me take ye out. If Miss O'Rourke will permit me to use her telephone, I'll have the car around in a few minutes. . . . That's the best way, isn't it?"

Mrs. Mendall felt again that she was coerced. She was certain now that MacAllister had brought her to the house purposely to meet Freda O'Rourke, and under her smiling exterior she was thoroughly annoyed. She remembered now that MacAllister had said she ought to talk to some of the women in Laclasse who were "doing for themselves." She had no intention of knowing such as Freda O'Rourke.

But she must make the best of it, and take care that she was not caught in the same manner again. "If you are sure it will not be inconvenient," she said pleasantly.

"No. I am going out yer way."

"The telephone is in the library—wouldn't you rather wait there?" Freda suggested.

Mrs. Mendall thanked her and they crossed to the room Mrs. Mendall had noticed when they came in. It was a library in the right sense, well-lighted, and the walls book-shelved half-way to the ceiling, an unusual library for a home.

Mrs. Mendall saw the books and litter of magazines

at a glance, but not more quickly than she noticed the painting that hung over the mantel. It was one of Mendall's paintings, one they had sold to MacAllister. Over the book-shelves was another. It was something of a shock to see them there; like meeting a near relation in surroundings that did credit to neither of them.

After one glance Mrs. Mendall averted her eyes, and possibly because of her expression, Freda made no comment on her new possessions. Instead, while MacAllister telephoned, she talked of the books. "My grandfather collected many of them. My father added to the collection, and I have done my humble best—that is why we have so many. Some of them are interesting. Nearly all of the books on this shelf are autographed by well-known people in my grandfather's day. My grandfather wrote a history of Virginia, and several historical novels. My father also wrote before his health failed."

"Was your family home in Virginia?" Mrs. Mendall asked.

"One of the oldest in the state."

"And what brought you west?"

"My father's mistaken idea that he would make money here."

"He is an invalid, is he not?" Mrs. Mendall asked.

"He has been bedridden for the last six years."

"And that has made it hard for you," Mrs. Mendall said, with a momentary return to the sympathy she had felt when MacAllister had given her the O'Rourke history. She spoke gently.

Freda O'Rourke turned away to finger a magazine on the table. "We have had our struggle." Then she said, a little impulsively: "Did you notice my garden? Are you interested in gardening?"

"I love it; but I have no such garden as you have. Mine is just a little scrap of a garden on our terrace." She had relaxed unconsciously under Freda's charm of manner.

"I have a wonderful book on the flowers and trees that do best in this climate—wouldn't you like to take it?" Freda offered.

"I would, if I had a moment to read it. But I am too terribly busy."

Mrs. Mendall had frozen again. If she borrowed, she must return, and she had no intention of seeing anything more of Freda O'Rourke. It was the barrier a woman knows so well how to erect between herself and the questionable woman.

But if Freda realized, she showed no sign. She turned to MacAllister, who, whether purposely or not, had taken some time over his telephoning. "Did you get your car, Alex?" she asked equably.

"Yes, Townley's bringing it. It'll be along in a minute."

"We can go down, then, and meet it," Mrs. Mendall suggested.

"As ye like." He glanced from one woman to the other. Mrs. Mendall's attitude was evident enough.

She thanked Freda without offering her hand. "It has been a pleasure—seeing your garden—I am grate-

ful to Mr. MacAllister." Her bright glance was for both of then, and then she tripped out.

MacAllister lingered a moment. When Mrs. Mendall was lost in the hall, he put his hands on Freda's shoulders and looked into her clouded eyes. "I'm sorry, Freda," he said. "I didn't think she would prove quite such a damned little prude!"

She brightened under his look. "Oh, she'll learn better. . . . It doesn't matter—you meant well, Alex. Don't let her suspect now that you are angry."

XXIX

A BIT OF BAD NEWS

MRS. MENDALL had time to feel thoroughly uncomfortable before MacAllister came down the steps of the O'Rourke house and silently helped her into his car. She was upheld, however, by a feeling of indignation; no one had a right to force such a woman as Freda O'Rourke upon her. She stiffened under her sense of offense.

Still it was a relief when MacAllister spoke without any appearance of anger. "I'm going a bit roundabout, but ye'll not mind that. I'll get ye home before the street-car would, in any case." He looked at her with a gleam of grim amusement in his eyes. "I'll bump ye over some dirt roads before our ride's over, Mrs. Mendall; but at present there's no need for ye to sit so uncompromisingly upright. . . . There's a comfortable back to yer seat, remember."

"I'm unused to motoring," she said, relaxing.

"It's a habit one acquires with great ease."

Mrs. Mendall felt at a loss for conversation. She certainly could not talk of the O'Rourke establishment. They rode in silence until they reached the boulevard and then turned southward. MacAllister was, as he

had said, taking a roundabout way; he was circling South Laclasse instead of going through it, which was the shortest road to the Mendall house.

MacAllister had a disagreeable bit of news to give Mrs. Mendall. It had been one of his reasons for wanting to take her home, but he did not want to venture upon it while he was angry. He had several ways of ridding himself of his frequent fits of irritation, and one was to talk steadily. He began to talk.

"Ye can't guess anything what it was like hereabout when I was a boy, Mrs. Mendall. All this we're traveling was just rolling prairie. Not a tree; not a roof. Sixteenth Street, that's the center of down-town now, limited Laclasse. That was no more than thirty-six years ago, or thereabouts, and here we are now with streets numbering westward to Fifty-second, and miles to the north and south. . . . We lived on Sixteenth—about where the City Bank is now—and the whole prairie was our back yard. Sixteenth was ankle deep with dust in the summer, and knee deep with mud in the winter—every street in town was. One of my first memories is getting stuck in the mud and being hauled out by my stepmother. I had new clothes on—that earned me the first licking I remember getting. The Indians walked up and down Broad Street in that day; it was no great surprise for any housewife in town to find an Indian sitting in her kitchen when she came into it, and she fed him, and quickly—unless her husband happened to be about. . . . It's certainly a changed place!"

"And I suppose you love it," Mrs. Mendall said, in tones that meant "How can you?"

"Yes, I love it!" MacAllister returned with a flash of feeling. "I love the very breath of it! And it's not just because I've put up my fight here and won out. It's the flesh and bone of me. I've gone east—I often go east—and I've gone abroad, but I don't draw a free breath until I'm back on the prairie again. . . . I mind when I was just old enough to climb to a horse's back, riding all over where we are now, dreaming I owned the whole of it. I was always for acquiring, and not just to hold, but for the sake of developing. It seemed to me it would be a big thing to build up a town and make the prairie feed it. . . . But for a few years I got diverted from the thing I really wanted to do. My father was a thrifty Scot; when I was fifteen he put me in his store, and I didn't like it. Besides, my stepmother was a bit too much for me. So I made up my mind I'd fend for myself. I mind, before I ran away, I deeded the only bit of property I owned, my scraggly bronco which I'd acquired of an Indian for the price of a drink, to Bagsby. Bagsby's always been something of an idealist; he felt he could improve that bronco, and I wanted three dollars to add to my little hoard. I hated to part with the bronco; I rather liked him for his devilish ways. Some things he did were unusual—when he'd balk he'd sit down on his haunches like a dog, and the world's coming to an end wouldn't have moved him. Bagsby didn't get much chance to reform him, though, for a

few days after he'd bought him the bronco sat down on the Union Pacific track and that ended the bronco —and very nearly ended Bagsby, too. . . . I've always maintained that the bronco mourned me to the extent of committing suicide."

MacAllister had talked himself back into the past and had forgotten his anger in doing so, though his reminiscences only led him into restless dissatisfaction with himself, a mood that had been upon him since the morning, a few days before, when he had carried his rage over his destroyed plant to Marie and had left her with feelings deeply stirred. He had been living over the past, and it had not made him happy.

Mrs. Mendall had watched his changes of expression curiously. She also had forgotten Freda O'Rourke. His talk of the past had taken her back to her first recollections of him. She was thinking of her schoolmate.

When MacAllister looked at her he caught her soberly wide-eyed expression and remarked abruptly: "Do ye know, when ye look like that, ye set me to wondering where I've seen ye before. Ye 'mind me to-day of somebody I can't place. I am wondering what yer first name may be?"

Mrs. Mendall was so startled that she answered at once: "My name is Margaret."

"That's curious. I decided that it was, and for no other reason than it's a big name for a wee woman, and being little ye'd be sure to have it."

Mrs. Mendall held her breath for a moment, for she

remembered with such distinctness that he had made the same remark when Eugenie had presented her to him twenty years before. He had swept her schoolmate completely off her feet, lifted her up and kissed her, quite oblivious of the shocked little girl who was backing out of the room. He had said then, "Eh, but that's a big name for a wee woman!" It was uncanny.

But MacAllister passed on to something else. "I suppose I've reached the age for fancies. . . . It's generally conceded that a woman's years of oddest fancies are from forty to fifty. They're man's too, I think. I'm convinced it's then he is most subject to infatuations. He's tried out most things by then; if he's anything of an accomplisher, he's accomplished by then. If he was born with a good constitution and has lived fairly sensibly, he feels as young as ever he did—he certainly feels more forceful. And yet he remembers the years that are behind him. Perhaps that's the reason he loves the sight of youth, more than ever in his life before, the sight and touch and the atmosphere of it—the feminine atmosphere in particular, I mean. I suppose that's why so many men just past forty do what poor Bagsby did, marry a young wife." He spoke with more than a touch of irritation.

"I should say that a man was equally subject to infatuations at any age," Mrs. Mendall remarked a little dryly. As usual she was thinking of her husband. Except for her momentary stir over Freda O'Rourke, she had been thinking steadily of him—and of Mrs. Bagsby.

His reference to Bagsby had reminded MacAllister of a disagreeable duty. "Speaking of Bagsby makes me think that I heard a bit of news this morning that won't please ye, though I think it's too early to begin worrying over it. The best thing's to consider how it can be prevented."

Mrs. Mendall's apprehensions seized upon the truth at once. "Not that Carl is going to be dropped from the schools?"

"So I heard. . . . But that doesn't mean the thing's accomplished. Far from it."

MacAllister added his word of encouragement quickly, for she grew very pale. He thought for a moment that she was going to faint. "I'd not be worrying over the matter if I were ye," he advised decidedly. "I may as well tell ye—I've had a word with Bagsby, and I'm afraid I can't move him. But there are other wires to pull. There's nothing ever gained by being panic-stricken."

MacAllister liked the way in which she gathered herself together. She met his eyes bravely. "I do not blame Mr. Bagsby, Mr. MacAllister; but I think it would be a terribly foolish thing for him to turn against my husband now. It is the worst thing he could do for his—for his family."

"Any one with a particle of penetration would think the same."

"I do not feel as—as helpless as I should have felt several weeks ago," Mrs. Mendall said a little unsteadily.

"Yer husband's not going out if I can prevent it, Mrs. Mendall."

"Thank you," she said. Her lips quivered, then set. "There will be some way out."

"That's right; that's the spirit!" MacAllister declared awkwardly.

He was immensely relieved that she had not wept. He was afraid that, with Bagsby against him, it would be no easy matter to keep Mendall in the schools, but he did not mean to tell Mrs. Mendall so. She looked very like a terrified child when she lost color—blue about the lips and beneath the eyes. He had no great opinion of Carl Mendall, but it was Mrs. Bagsby whom he blamed for the whole affair. Mendall was a mere man; what could you expect?

MacAllister did not want to talk any more about the matter, and Mrs. Mendall rose immeasurably in his estimation, when she began to talk of other things. They had passed the city limits, and had begun to bump over rough roads. Mrs. Mendall was not paying attention to their surroundings, so she looked her surprise when they climbed a slope and then turned out of the road across a level space that brought them to the edge of a steep incline.

"It's all right," MacAllister said. "I came this way out of purpose. I wanted to look at the work down there."

To Mrs. Mendall it looked like chaos. Below them, some little distance away on the level, was a conglomeration of men and mules and wagons. There were

piles of débris about still, patches that had been cleared, and spaces that were already leveled for foundations. There were teams, a steady procession of them, hauling bricks, sacks of cement, and lumber. The near end of the railroad track that led to the Union Pacific line was being restored. The place swarmed with activity. It was the first time Mrs. Mendall had seen what had been MacAllister's plant.

"You are rebuilding?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Will you make a munition plant of it?"

MacAllister had been asked the same question times out of number in the last few days. From his instant rebuilding, Laclasse judged that he meant to go on; that would be like Alexander MacAllister. He gave his usual answer: "I never tell what I'm going to do till it's done."

"Have you any clue yet, as to who did it?"

"If I have, it's a thing I can't tell. . . . I see my red roadster down there, so Townley evidently got out on time with the orders I sent by him. He's useful to me in all this rush of work." He spoke with a certain dry satisfaction that mingled curiously with restless irritation.

He continued to watch, leaning on the steering-wheel, and after looking at what was going on below, Mrs. Mendall studied him. It struck her again, forcibly, that he looked harassed. The destruction of his property was enough, in itself, to upset most men, but Mrs. Mendall was very certain that Marie was, in part,

the cause of his anxiety. He certainly loved his daughter, that was more and more apparent, and his anxiety had increased in proportion to his love. It was natural. He was too young a man to have the direction of a woman's future thrust upon him, and such a woman as Marie promised to be.

MacAllister had sat motionless for some time, when, suddenly, he straightened, and with so fierce a look that she was startled. Just below, nearer the base of the hill, was a road cut so deep in the red soil that a bank lifted between it and the activity in the valley, a natural breastwork behind which a man stood, while through field-glasses he studied the operations in the distance. MacAllister was looking down on him, his always tanned face grown brick-red.

When finally he turned on Mrs. Mendall there was a dangerous light in his eyes. "Ye see him?" he demanded. "Ye see his car a little down the road there. Do ye recognize him?"

"I think it is Mr. Kraup," Mrs. Mendall said with a touch of excitement. All Laclasse had hazarded guesses as to Andrew Kraup's possible part in the destruction of MacAllister's plant. There had been much bitter feeling expressed—both pro-German and anti-German.

"Ye're right—it's he. . . . All right for ye, Mr. Andrew Kraup!" And MacAllister swung himself out of the car.

He looked fighting angry, and Mrs. Mendall ex-

claimed in alarm: "Mr. MacAllister, don't! What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going down to ask him the time of day—don't ye be afraid, Mrs. Mendall. I mean to watch a bit without being seen—spy on the spy. If he looks up and sees yer white gown, it doesn't matter. I can't back the car without a rumpus."

He spoke more coolly. He stood beside her, his head and shoulders hidden by her body, his eyes on the man below. Mrs. Mendall also watched, but with frequent glances at the face close to her shoulder, a foreshortened view of thick brows, steely eyes and tight lips, his steady, deep-breathing strength, and for the first time she yielded Alexander MacAllister a reluctant admiration. It was the primitive appeal, and she recognized it as such. What wonder that Freda O'Rourke had given him six years of devotion!

Suddenly the arm that rested on the back of her seat circled her. "Turn yer back on him now—turn around to me," MacAllister ordered. "He's going. Just keep turned till I tell ye to move."

For several minutes Mrs. Mendall looked down on MacAllister's bent head and broad shoulders, and then he straightened. "He's backed around the curve, and we'll be off, too. . . . I'll get ye home now in short time."

And he did. They went at such speed that there was no opportunity for conversation. The only remark MacAllister made, until they reached the grove, was:

"It's too much to ask of a man—to give up an enterprise, when his enemy shows his hand as plainly as that man does."

His heavy frown did not lift until he saw on the slope of Twin Oaks Hill the red patch that indicated Marie. Then his scowl left him. He looked, all at once, as eager and almost as young as the boy who had loved Eugenie. "I guessed she'd be waiting for me," he said.

XXX

MRS. MENDALL ACTS

THE next morning, when Mrs. Mendall came into the Laclasse National Bank, the place was crowded. It was the usual Saturday morning rush of business. The cashier's desk was surrounded, and in his more secluded retreat Frederick Bagsby was talking to a group of men.

Mrs. Mendall was given a seat near Bagsby's enclosure. She sat tensely upright, waiting until he parted with the men who were talking to him. They were all laughing as they went out; then Bagsby turned to her.

The instant he recognized her his face changed. "It's Mrs. Mendall, isn't it?" he asked. "Did you—want to see me?" He had sobered. There was constraint in his manner.

"If you can spare a few moments," Mrs. Mendall said evenly.

"Why—certainly—if it's important. This is our busy day—"

It was plain he was taken aback. When she said steadily, "Yes, it is important, or I would not trouble you," an anxious line appeared between his brows.

He offered her a chair, but Mrs. Mendall hesitated. "Can we talk here without being overheard?"

"Perhaps the inner room would be better," he muttered.

He hastened to hold the door for her, and then closed it securely. When he faced her at the table he had grown crimson, and there was real alarm in his usually kindly eyes. "Well, what is it?" he demanded.

"Is it true, Mr. Bagsby, that the school board intends to drop my husband?" Mrs. Mendall asked, in the same steady way in which she had spoken from the beginning.

"Oh!" Bagsby said, with a note of relief. "Sit down, Mrs. Mendall; sit down please, while I explain. . . . The board wants to cut down expenses, as usual, and there has been talk of making a change in the art department. You know I had difficulty in persuading them three years ago to increase the salary of the art teacher. They seem to think the result doesn't justify the expenditure." He had regained his usual business manner.

"And you think it would be a wise thing to drop my husband?" Mrs. Mendall was very pale, as she had been when she had talked with MacAllister; a little blue about the lips and eyes.

Frederick Bagsby was, as a rule, a kind-hearted man. He was very sorry for Mrs. Mendall. It had never occurred to him that she might come to him to plead for her husband. The situation was painful. But he was also a determined man when roused. Carl

Mendall was a menace; Bagsby felt that he was quite within his right in letting the school board make its decision without his interference. He had not instigated the movement to oust Mendall. He had been neutral and intended to remain so.

He spoke firmly. "I think, Mrs. Mendall, the decisions of the board are usually wise ones."

"Have you heard any complaint of my husband as a teacher?"

"No. He is considered a good teacher. It is simply a question of cutting down expenses."

Mrs. Mendall had carefully and painfully considered her plan of procedure; she had spent a wretched night in trying to decide what was best. She continued steadily. "I am glad to be assured of that, for I realize, just as you do, that the mistakes Carl has made are entirely aside from his efficiency as a teacher. . . . I understand perfectly why you have withdrawn your support from my husband, and to a certain extent I sympathize with you. The important thing is —is it wise for you to do so just now?"

Bagsby straightened. "I don't understand you!" he said sharply.

"Did you think any other consideration than my husband's good name would have brought me to you?" Mrs. Mendall retorted. "I mean that if there has not already been general criticism of your wife's conduct with my husband, an antagonistic attitude on your part is certain to arouse it."

"My wife—" Bagsby said. "My wife's conduct

with your husband!" He rose in his anger and stood over her. "Be careful what you say!"

Her eyes widened as she looked up at him. "Do you mean you didn't know—?"

"That I didn't know *what?*"

Mrs. Mendall was silent from surprise—and concern. She would not have struck him as she had, had she known. She had acted in ignorance. . . . But the thing was done.

"I thought you knew," she said in a subdued way.

"You thought I knew *what?*" Bagsby repeated, breathing quickly. "I don't want to forget that you're a woman, Mrs. Mendall! . . . Please explain yourself."

"I would not have come—not in this way—if I had thought that you did not at least suspect," Mrs. Mendall said in distress. "I thought you must know that your wife has been acting like an infatuated woman—and that my—my husband has not done as he should; that you had guessed there was talk. It seemed natural that you should want him out of the way."

"There's some mistake. My wife's not that sort of a woman!" Bagsby said hotly.

"The woman a man knows least about is his wife."

"What are you basing your suspicions on?" Bagsby demanded, though his raised voice had lowered. There was such absolute conviction in Mrs. Mendall's troubled eyes—and such honest compassion. It was her compassion that sickened him. He had been utterly unsuspecting. He had thought his wife too self-

respecting, too critical and too fastidious for even flippant conduct. On the heels of anger had come bewilderment. . . . But after the first blind flash of unbelief, a hundred small indications crowded upon him—and the large fact of his wife's ennui. . . . It loomed upon Bagsby that his wife was capable of deceit.

"I don't believe there has been actual bad conduct; I will not believe that," Mrs. Mendall said. "But it is true that your wife has persistently sought my husband. She has flattered him as a clever woman knows how to flatter an artist. She has not hesitated to come into my house—under my very roof—to take possession of him. She has written him silly notes. This morning he received a note asking him to meet her this evening, after the Art League meeting—that she would be driving her electric, and alone. . . . I've seen these notes, but not through any disloyalty of Carl's; simply that it did not occur to him to destroy them. He is a careless man in everything but his work; careless in his attitude to woman; perhaps more careless in that respect than in any other. . . . I heard yesterday that the board thought of dropping Carl. When I saw that note I decided to come to you. It seemed the best thing to do." She stopped.

Bagsby did not look at her when she had finished. He was looking down. "How much of all this does Clare know?" he asked heavily.

He did not doubt what he had heard. In spite of her detestation of his wife, Mrs. Mendall was trying

to speak without exaggeration. She felt her husband's defection too keenly. . . . And it all tallied so well with his own knowledge—now that he understood.

"I don't know. . . . Your daughter is a good woman, Mr. Bagsby. I have sometimes thought she was sacrificing herself for your sake. I have talked a good deal with her. She is fine and upright. You have a real friend in her, I am certain."

"It's over her I've been worrying; I thought Blanche was safe enough," Bagsby said, with the simplicity of the man who has been hard hit. "It didn't seem best —Clare's seeing so much of a young man like—your husband. That's all I was thinking of. I've felt lately that I hadn't considered Clare enough when I married. You know how it is with a man, Mrs. Mendall—he doesn't stop to think when he is in love. I didn't realize what it means to marry so young a woman." He looked at her now, the look of a man who is ashamed of his closest possession.

"I know," Mrs. Mendall said with quick sympathy. Her discomfort made her rise; it seemed cruel to sit there looking at his hurt and shame.

Bagsby drew himself up. "Just the same, Mrs. Mendall, I mean to guard my home." The red light grew in his eyes, and suddenly flamed. "I'll—I'd *kill* the man I found in my wife's company!"

Mrs. Mendall nodded. She liked that touch of the male animal; just as she had liked the ugly fighting man in MacAllister; as she liked her husband when the thunderous mood was on him. "I can make no

promises for Carl; he will have to choose," she said quietly. "And you will know how to deal with your wife. . . . I have thought about this trouble longer than you have, Mr. Bagsby; your wife has a high regard for her social position; she will not be likely to jeopardize it." The detéstation of Blanche Bagsby that was in her lifted its head: "The fear of losing position is the only whip that will cut to the quick of some women. 'What people will say' constitutes their whole moral code. . . . As for Carl—I count on the fact that he forgets easily." Her lips quivered, then set.

Even in his perturbation Bagsby was impressed by her. In spite of her surprising composure she was suffering keenly; her very profound self-respect was affronted. And she loved her husband, passionately and protectively. "I'm sorry enough for all this," he said awkwardly. "I can't say what I think of my—of my household's having any part in it—I—" Bagsby stopped and offered his hand.

Mrs. Mendall gave him her small clasp. "Thank you," she said, with the dimpled smile that often as not covered a heartache. "I know you agree with me now that it would not be wise to stir up talk by depriving my husband of his position. It would be laid to your door. You can't afford it—you have Clare to think of."

Mrs. Mendall had not forgotten her purpose. Her lips tightened slightly as she exacted her condition. Bagsby knew from the steady look she gave him that

she would fight. His hatred of Carl Mendall would not be allowed that outlet. And his good sense agreed with her.

"I think you are right," he said.

Mrs. Mendall knew that it was a promise, and she smiled her pretty smile in return for it.

She went out into the sun and waited on the corner, bent upon getting the first car that would take her home. She looked with wide eyes that did not see at people and vehicles. Her hands and feet were like ice. She felt for a time as if she would faint. It was terribly hard to fight like that, and there was a still more painful undertaking before her.

XXXI

AN ULTIMATUM

MRS. MENDALL sat in the twilight with hands folded, waiting. She had waited through that long Saturday afternoon, seated in the same low chair, stitching yards of thoughts into the soft white material that now lay folded beside her. She had looked up with a smile for MacAllister when he had come for Marie, and had smiled again when he said:

"I've had another talk with Bagsby, Mrs. Mendall; I caught him just before the bank closed. I think ye need not worry over the school matter. Bagsby's promised me he's going to stand yer friend." MacAllister was glad he could convey that bit of comfort to her before Marie came down, for she looked so pale. Anxiety had told on her.

Mrs. Mendall had not enlightened him. She had thanked him prettily, and then smiled on Marie who came out to them looking as brilliant as a tropical bird in her swathing of dull gold and red.

"I'm taking Marie to dine with me at the Country Club," MacAllister had announced, "so don't ye be disturbed if she's gone till a late hour. I had a reporter troubling me this morning for particulars con-

cerning my ward—the Sunday paper'll have an article. It's time I showed her to Laclasse."

Though Mrs. Mendall was too much absorbed by her thoughts to give close attention, she felt his manner. He evidently took no pleasure in Marie's début. He was decided and yet anxious. And his manner to Marie was different, as affectionate as ever, tenderly so, he fairly lifted the girl to her seat beside him in the car, questioning the warmth of her coat, and eager for her comfort, but it was plain that he was oppressed, and not with happiness. Evidently he had decided on his course, but he might well look grave at the thought of presenting Marie to Laclasse, and not as his daughter. Mrs. Mendall knew what would be his reasons for doing such a thing, but he was certainly taking risks. She wondered what would grow out of it all.

Then she returned to her own problem. A little later on, she looked up to smile on Lucy, when in attire as brilliant, though not so rich as Marie's, the mulatto rounded the house, bound for the car that would take her for a gala Saturday night in Laclasse.

Mrs. Mendall had sat on, until the shadows lengthened—until Mendall came out, hatless but with walking stick under his arm. "I'm going for a walk," he said. "I've been down and foraged, so don't get any supper for me. I will be back by eight—in time to get the car. It's the Art League meeting to-night." He had touched her cheek, and then he also had gone out through the grove.

Mrs. Mendall remained where she was, but the blood rose in such a surge to throat and brow that her eyes were blinded. It throbbed in her finger-tips; she could not sew.

It was then she folded her work and waited—until through the twilight she saw her husband returning.

"I've been looking at the sunset," he said, as he came up. "There's red-gold enough in the sky for a kingdom. . . . Do you know what time it is? I went without my watch."

"You have three-quarters of an hour yet."

"Good!" He sat on the edge of the porch, leaning against one of the pillars. "Have you had supper, Margaret?"

"No."

Mendall noticed her manner for the first time. "What's wrong?" he asked. "You're not ill, are you?"

She was silent.

Mendall studied her in the dimness. She looked very small and white, sitting there in her little chair. "What is it now?" he repeated, with a touch of resignation. He hated household anxieties.

"I heard yesterday, Carl, that you were to be dropped from the schools." She spoke as if her throat were dry.

There was a silence in which Mrs. Mendall counted the seconds by heart-beats.

Then Mendall said: "So it's come, has it—" He sat still under the realization—for a moment—until an uncontrollable wave of relief, the uplifting sense of

freedom swept him. He rose suddenly and stretched, arms high, stretched like an animal freed from harness.

Then as suddenly his arms dropped, and he sat down again at her feet. "I am sorry for you, Margaret," he said in low tones. After a moment he added: "I suppose Mrs. Bagsby will get me some private pupils."

It was the spur Mrs. Mendall needed. She stiffened. "I went to Mr. Bagsby this morning, Carl. I knew, of course, that he had withdrawn his support, and I thought I knew why. . . . He knows all I know, and he knows also that there has been gossip. . . . We talked for some time, and I finally persuaded him that the way to make scandal out of gossip was for him to turn against you. He has his wife's good name to guard."

It took Mendall a moment to grasp all her speech implied, and then he turned on her. "I've done his wife no harm!" he flashed. "It's been nothing but play! Just an outgrowth of the deadly monotony of this place! I've tried to tell you so all along."

"I doubt if you could harm Mrs. Bagsby," Mrs. Mendall said with immeasurable contempt. "The note she wrote you yesterday was not written by a decent woman. It is not play with her, and it would not be with you. Something has made her drop her mask a little. She was more careful in her other effusions." Mrs. Mendall spoke less clearly. "I have seen them all, Carl. It is the first time I have ever spied on you,

but I was so terribly afraid of the harm you were going to do to yourself."

"So you searched my pockets and overhauled my desk, did you?" Mendall said with a half laugh. "Well, I never!"

It was a flash of his usual irresponsible humor. He was genuinely amused. If it had mattered to him particularly, he would have been furious. As it was he laughed.

"I didn't want to do it, but I was terribly afraid," Mrs. Mendall repeated, in a smothered way.

"I don't mind," he said. "If you had put a knife in me, or clawed me, as a result, I'd have thought it natural enough. All of which shows I'm an unregenerate beast, I suppose." He leaned toward her, his hands seeking her waist. "Margaret, listen to me, dear—"

But she drew back, well out of his reach. "Don't touch me!" she said with sudden passion. "I don't want to claw you! I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world—I couldn't hurt you! No matter what you made me suffer, I couldn't hurt you! You are everything to me. Even when you have wandered away from me, I've not reproached you; I've only tried in every way to guard you. I have always tried to guard you and help you and sustain you—ever since you were a boy." Her voice began to fail: "And I love you—in other ways—you know how. . . ."

"Margaret!"

She pushed his hands away, caught her breath, and went on: "But to-day I decided that, if necessary, I could live without you; that this is the last time I struggle for you against another woman." She pulled her skirt from his hold and rose, retreating to the door. "I know there have been times when you have wanted to be free. If you want to be—if you want to —to go into town to-night, you must go. You needn't come to tell me—your going will tell me. . . ."

She sped through the hall and into their room. Mendall heard the door close on her.

XXXII

A DECISION

MENDALL was left to consider his wife's ultimatum: Margaret, the wise, the secretive, the slow to anger and quick in sympathy, always responsive to his touch, impassioned and at the same time tender, had told him that he was free to go if he wished, and mingled with his amazement was consternation.

Carl Mendall had a lifetime knowledge of Margaret Mendall; she meant what she had said. He had some conception of the agony of mind that had made such a declaration possible. With most women it would indicate merely an ebullition of anger, but not with Margaret. With her it was the outgrowth of three years of consideration. It was not simply Mrs. Bagsby that had aroused her; it was his entire careless attitude to marriage; his slight regard for bonds that to her were sacred. . . . If they were to go on together, it would only be under solemn promise. If she came into his arms again, it would only be because of restored confidence.

Was it in him to keep such a promise? Was it in him to fight temptation—paint in spite of it? . . . That would be as hard as his frequent stifling of the

mad impulse to fling aside every bond and walk out into the world with nothing but the implements for creating color strapped to his back. Again and again his affection had held him from that. In what fashion would he be repaying Margaret for the years she had given him!

Carl Mendall rarely troubled himself over right or wrong—whether he painted to the best advantage or not interested him far more. And the fact that his wife, in spite of her bravery, would be desolate without him, touched him much more closely than any consciousness of wrong-doing. He was not in the least given to self-questioning or self-analysis, or he might have asked himself what he would do if Mrs. Bagsby mattered greatly to him. And also it might have occurred to him that he was so absorbed by interest in Marie that his home and his studio had become pleasant places.

Though not exactly of this nature, it was the thought of Marie that kept him from almost instantly following his wife. Mrs. Bagsby he dismissed from his consideration in the time it took him to shrug. What did their little emotional episode amount to! He had painted a somewhat truer portrait of the woman as a result; that was all. She was too conventional, too usual, to stir him particularly. He had realized that from the beginning.

But this girl who by odd chance was a part of their household concerned him vitally. She was a marvel.

A mystery she might be to many, but not to him. He burned to paint the reality of her, and in defiance of her assumptions, her audacity, her sophisticated yellow smile. Did she think she deceived him! A jungle-woman, she was. A tiger-woman—no matter who had fathered her.

She warned him that there should be no play in their intercourse but that made her only the more alluring. It was Marie's potentiality for mischief that kept him sitting in thought. Could he give her defiance for defiance; reach the truth of her without mastering her—and without being mastered himself? Until he went to his wife assured of his own strength of will, and his right intention, what he would say to her would be little else than a perjury. . . . It had not occurred to him before that there might be a certain joy in systematically playing the game of defiance. It would be like riding a horse that was bent upon throwing him.

That the whole procedure would be a secret from Margaret did not concern him. She had never been part of his work; she was entirely aside from it; she had no real understanding of it. As long as he was assured in his own mind that there would be no such complications as had arisen with Mrs. Bagsby, his conscience would be clear. He decided that he would take Marie at her word; there should be no such complications.

Mendall rose and went to his wife. He gathered

into his arms the small huddled body he found on their bed, winning his forgiveness in man fashion. That still night, when all the rest of the world was about its own concerns, and their roof covered them alone, lived long in Margaret Mendall's memory.

XXXIII

MARIE CHARMS LACLASSE

THE end of June brought shimmering heat to the prairie states. Nebraska corn stood nearly a yard high; the billowing wheat began to hint subtly of the yellow harvest to come; above the steady on-moving current of the Missouri, creeping along the flats and edging its willow-hung islands, was blue haze, while over the whole land, river-lands, wheat-lands, the bustle of Laclasse and the silence of the open spaces, the fluff from the cottonwoods, like blown dandelion down, played hide-and-seek. The Bellevue hills were dusted with the impalpable white caught up from the ravines.

And with the coming of summer Marie had also bloomed into colorful luxuriance—as Carl Mendall had known she would. Her hair had gained the sheen of a tiger's coat, and her body the clean-muscled litheness of the jungle prowler. Her lashes were tipped with gold, her skin had the texture and color of rich cream; she had lost every trace of jaundiced emaciation.

But in spite of the wish to join with Laclasse in its acclamation over a nine days' wonder, Mrs. Mendall

did not consider Marie beautiful. Her eyes were too wide apart and too heavy-lidded; her nose, with its slightly-broadened nostrils, not delicate enough for beauty; her lips were too full and her chin too decided. In spite of her golden tints, to Mrs. Mendall, she always suggested the dusky. One society reporter, who had never in her life been east of Chicago, or south of Lincoln, Nebraska, described Alexander MacAllister's ward as a "golden brunette, that wonderful combination of Latin and Saxon coloring which one so often sees in the capitals of Europe, and so rarely in our own country. Miss Ogilvie's father was a Scotchman, a cousin of Mr. Alexander MacAllister's, and her mother a Frenchwoman."

Mrs. Mendall had smiled over that all-wise society item. She smiled frequently these days, for things were well with her husband and herself. She was happier than she had been since her early married days. The school board had reappointed Mendall; the last instalment had been paid on their house; they were actually property owners, and had a sum in bank. And now the schools had closed, Carl was absorbed in his studio, while she made progress at the business college. And she was no longer working in secrecy. She had confessed to Mendall what she was doing. To her surprise, he had not objected. Mrs. Mendall was very content.

Sitting five mornings of the week over her typewriter, she heard much of the town gossip. The girls

about her talked. One of the first things she had heard was that Alexander MacAllister had announced that he intended to adopt his cousin's daughter. That he had told both Frederick Bagsby and Mrs. Kotany that such was his intention. There was no man in the city closer to MacAllister than Frederick Bagsby, and Mrs. Kotany was Laclasse's most popular social leader; Mrs. Bagsby with all her maneuvering would never be able to eclipse her; Mrs. Kotany was loved, Mrs. Bagsby was not. Mrs. Kotany was *of Laclasse, of Nebraska,* a genial, frank-spoken middle-western product, no importation. MacAllister had made his announcement to people whose word carried weight.

There was also talk of MacAllister and Freda O'Rourke. MacAllister had motored through Laclasse with her frequently. He had also taken Marie to see her. It was known that he had invited Freda to the dinner and dance he had given for his ward, and that Freda had declined on the ground that it was a young people's party, which was quite true. MacAllister had gathered together the young society people of Laclasse.

MacAllister's having opened his house to society created a stir. He constantly entertained men, both eastern and western capitalists, but only very occasionally did he give a dinner party that included their wives, and then only for business reasons. He was rarely inveigled into accepting an invitation to anything. Social Laclasse saw very little of him, and

because of his own ruling. Like most unsocial bachelors with fortunes, he was known to take his pleasures as pleased him.

So his departure from habit impressed Laclasse; focused their attention upon his attitude to Marie, which was probably exactly what MacAllister intended. It was the custom in Laclasse, as elsewhere, for parents to give coming-out parties for their daughters. There were those who doubted, of course, but they kept their doubts to themselves, for MacAllister had been too decided in his expression of paternal interest to admit of ugly comments.

Mrs. Mendall heard much of Marie's charms. She had impressed Laclasse as excessively foreign, yet gracious and graceful—and a wonderful dancer. The boys and the group of society bachelors to whom Marie was introduced declared that she danced marvelously. It was reported that she had made several conquests. Harmon Kent, a much-divorced man, whom MacAllister heartily detested, was said to be taken with Marie. Ellis Kraup was also said to be fascinated by her, and in spite of the fact that he was supposed to be Clare Bagsby's possession. It was noticed that Clare ignored his defection by showing particular cordiality to Marie. Mrs. Mendall thought possibly she would hear gossip about the Bagsby family, but she did not—only that Mrs. Bagsby was gaily social; that she was entertaining a great deal. She received no intimation that her checkmating of Mrs. Bagsby was known.

The truth was that life was moving on in the Bagsby household apparently much as usual, except that Clare was rarely with her stepmother now, and often with her father, and Mrs. Bagsby was not troubled by her husband's attentions. Though alternately chilled by fear and warmed by anger, Mrs. Bagsby adapted herself.

In her consternation over Mrs. Mendall's spirited move, Mrs. Bagsby had fallen back upon the flirtatious wife's usual defense: "It is not true!" she had declared, in answer to her husband's accusations. "There has never been anything between Carl Mendall and myself but friendly interest. I thought the time had passed when a woman could not speak to a man, or write him a friendly note without the worst motives being ascribed to her. Mrs. Mendall is simply an insanely jealous woman. And you have hurt me terribly by your doubts; you have insulted me; things will never be the same between us again—"

Bagsby had been helpless against the torrent that poured over him. He had taken his hurt and his certainty to Clare. Their talk had been long and confidential. Clare had not tried to make matters worse than they were, but she had been forced to give her estimate of Blanche Bagsby's character, and Bagsby had hung his head in realization. He was an honest little man; he hated intrigue and deceit. But he was not the man to court open rupture. Outwardly all was as usual with the Bagsbys.

Bagsby did not tell Clare all he knew about Marie

Ogilvie until the morning after MacAllister's dinner dance. Then he told her of Marie's curious advent on the rainy night when he had been dining with MacAllister. He told her what MacAllister had said about adopting a daughter, and the close questioning to which he had been subjected.

Clare listened to his account with the deepest interest. "I don't know what to make of it all," she said. "She is puzzling, and I can't make Mr. MacAllister out at all. Why doesn't he marry and have children of his own?"

"I don't know," Bagsby said thoughtfully. "I understand Mac pretty well, but I've never puzzled out his kink against marriage. Bachelors do talk as he does about marriage, and in their hearts think just the opposite, but I believe Mac's honest in his reluctance. And I don't know, either, what to make of his devotion to this French girl. . . . Mac's been no saint, Clare; he's not the type to whom saintliness comes easy. Men, as a rule, belong to one of three classes: the average vulnerable male who draws a straight line between the woman he respects and the woman he doesn't; second, the one woman man; and, third, the man to whom all women are much the same —he has no reverence for anything feminine—he never thinks of any one or anybody but himself. . . . Now Mac belongs to the large first class. He's as hard as nails in business, and shrewd, but I know what most people don't, that he's not so vulnerable in just

the ordinary way; he has a soft spot in his heart for women; particularly for the girl who's down on her luck. Every girl who's ever appealed to him—to my knowledge—has got at him by a hard-luck story. If she hadn't been straight, and it wasn't in her to be straight—well, once or twice there have been complications. It depended largely on her. Now with this O'Rourke affair: I know that, in the beginning, the whole family would have gone to the wall but for Mac. What's grown out of it, I don't know—Laclasse doesn't know—but, as I say, with Mac it would depend on Freda O'Rourke—it usually does depend on the woman, for that matter. . . . But take Kraup, now—he comes under the second count; he married that plain little German wife of his when he was a boy, and I don't believe he's ever swerved from her; he's a born family man. And I believe, given the right wife, Ellis will turn out the same sort. That's why I've favored him beyond the other boys you know. He's young and impressionable, but he's got good blood in him."

Clare had flushed at the mention of Ellis. "And the third class?" she asked, a little hastily.

"Oh, well—Mendall's an example. He'd compromise a girl or another man's wife—it would be all one to him—he'd call it passion for his art, or something of the kind, and let it go at that. But," and Bagsby winced at the admission, "with him, too, it would depend a lot on the woman. . . . Still, there's a mighty

difference between his sort and Mac's, I can tell you! Mac would no more tamper with innocence or lead away another man's wife than he'd—well, than he'd marry a questionable woman. . . . It's because I know him so well, I've felt doubtful about this Marie Ogilvie. I knew she was something or other to him, that was plain enough the night she came. But to be told that he meant to adopt her! And he said it with the look of the man who'll stand for no questioning, just as he looks when any one asks him about his plant. It's six weeks now, the work out there begins to show for something, and no one in Laclasse knows whether he means to manufacture shrapnel or plows, or whether he's got any clue to who blew him up. . . . So with this girl. I feel there's a lot he could say, and won't. It makes me suspicious of her."

"She's beautiful and fascinating," Clare said.

"But you don't like her, do you?" her father asked quickly.

"Yes—I think I do," Clare answered slowly. "I think she is very clever. . . . I think, if you don't mind, Dad, I'll go and call on her this afternoon."

"Out there!" Bagsby exclaimed sharply. "I've sent that man a check for Blanche's portrait, and have his acknowledgment—that ends our connection with *them.*"

Clare was accustomed now to giving advice and affection. Her father was hers to care for, as he used to be. She kissed him, rubbing the frown from his

forehead. "I think it would be wise for me to call on Mrs. Mendall as well as on Marie Ogilvie, Daddy dear. We want to keep friends with Mrs. Mendall. I'll have to call on Mr. MacAllister's ward sooner or later, and her home's at the Mendalls' for the summer—she told me so."

"You're right, I suppose," Bagsby agreed with a sigh. "I shall be surprised, though, if you take to that girl."

"She's brilliant, but there's something sad about her, too, Daddy. I'd like to find out a little what she really is."

XXXIV

THE GAME OF DEFIANCE

CARL MENDALL was also trying to discover what Marie Ogilvie really was. He was seeing more of her than any one else; more even than MacAllister.

The game of defiance had begun, and Mendall was absorbed by it. During the first two weeks of June, when he had only snatched opportunities for painting, he had posed Marie again and again, sketched and resketched her. He was waiting for her to grow into perfection, studying, meantime, her grace, her lazy energy, her astonishing pliability; tempting her by every art he knew into fuller revelation of herself.

He meant to discover what manner of woman Marie really was, and without any emotional entanglements. Just what Marie's purpose was in giving him the opportunity, Mendall could not determine. He had the average man's conceit; it was quite possible that she was interested in him and at the same time determined not to show it; possibly it was all defiance; possibly it was enjoyment of an unusual situation; Mendall did not know just what was her purpose.

His own purpose was clear enough to himself: he meant to get at the real Marie and paint a marvelous thing, take pure joy in doing it, and at the same time hold up to Marie's yellow gaze his discovery of her. She might keep her purpose to herself.

He entered upon his venture with zest.

It took him some time to determine how much of Marie's careless freedom when she was in his studio was natural—simply Marie as she had been in the habit of being—and how much was skilful acting. She sat at his breakfast table, the same aloof member of the household she had always been, except that now she always gave Mrs. Mendall an account of herself. If she was going to be in the studio that morning, she told her so. After her introduction to Laclasse society she dutifully stated to Mrs. Mendall what were her engagements. She never really conversed. Then, when Mrs. Mendall had started for the city and the mulatto woman was definitely engaged below, she slipped into his studio and with the closing of the door was transformed.

Sometimes she came in her kimono and sandals, with hair hanging in braids; but more often in her russet gown, silk-stockinged and satin-shod.

She very soon threw aside her drawing. "Why continue with a pretense?" she said briefly.

Thereafter she roamed the studio at her own sweet will—except when Mendall halted her because of some pose that pleased him.

"You are long in beginning your masterpiece, Señor," she remarked one day.

"I want to give my whole time to it when I do begin," was his excuse.

"As you will," she had returned carelessly. "I am content."

She appeared to be. She sat by the half-hour on his couch with knee embraced and slipper dangling, talking apparently of any subject that entered her head, though in reality, as Mendall discovered, skilfully avoiding every point upon which Mendall wished to be enlightened. If so minded she stretched herself full length on the couch, or, sitting on the floor with his sketches in her lap, criticized them unmercifully. Or with hands clasped behind her head and her body stretched to a full display of its beautiful lines, she would wander about the studio looking at his paintings, talking of color with a keen appreciation that thrilled him.

He discovered that she smoked with zest. When released from some pose which she had maintained for an astonishingly long time, she would stretch herself on the couch and become somnolent. Once, when she lay with eyes half closed and Mendall sat studying her somewhat heavy immobility of feature, it had occurred to him to pass her his lighted cigarette. Her fingers received it with perfect naturalness, her heavy eyelids merely drooping a little more in languid enjoyment of a pleasure long denied. Mendall became convinced that she had been in and out of studios with

all the careless freedom she now displayed. She understood the art of posing; she posed with the ease of a professional, more tirelessly, and with more adaptability and intelligence than any professional Mendall had ever known.

And despite her reticences she disclosed a fund of experience. She appeared to have roamed over most of Europe; her descriptions were too colorful not to have been experiences. But the how or why of such roaming remained unexplained. Mendall soon stopped asking such pertinent questions; she slid too smilingly from beneath them.

When Marie became so intimately a part of Mendall's life that he unconsciously took a possessive view of her, MacAllister's devotion to her and her devotion to MacAllister was a constant irritation. Mendall had, in his own mind, placed the worst construction on MacAllister's growing intimacy with Marie—until MacAllister had introduced Marie to Laclasse. He had not known then what to think. Some of his surmises were scattered to the wind. He tried to get Marie to talk about MacAllister and was met by tigerish ferocity. He succeeded only once in drawing an opinion from her; when he had ventured to test her regarding Freda O'Rourke. His remark was a mere suggestion, but Marie lifted her head as instantly as would a disturbed snake.

"You intimate a liaison, Señor? Such is not my belief! . . . And were it true—the little family is usual—what concern is it of ours?"

"If it does not concern you, it certainly does not concern me," Mendall retorted.

She continued to look at him with eyes ominously narrowed. "You consider yourself qualified to cast the first stone, I presume, Señor?"

"I am not, indeed!" Mendall protested.

"Nor am I." She rose and left the room, her head held high.

Mendall never again mentioned MacAllister. The fear of losing Marie's daily companionship was all-powerful. He was wretched until she appeared again.

But he liked her foreign view-point, just as he delighted in her unconventionalities. She was an absorbingly interesting companion. There were frequent occasions when she snarled at him, but there were other times when Mendall found her intensely lovable; times when she was sweetness itself. She was always frankly admiring of his work; even when she criticized it. She was so genuinely interested in his method of painting. She would not tell him how she had learned the little secrets of mixing and applying color so as to secure certain effects, though she imparted her knowledge with eager pleasure. She had studio language at her tongue's end. She carried him away from Laclasse into an artist's heaven. At such times Mendall nearly lost his self-restraint. Only the wholesome fear of being left to face an intolerable blank restrained him.

But much more often it was defiance for defiance with him. Occasionally she was girlishly amusing.

When she began to see something of Laclasse society, Mendall discovered how accurate was her appraisement of every creature that came her way. She had a sense of humor. She mimicked, impersonated, characterized with consummate skill the people she met. Laclasse she declared to be, "Much sun and wind, much money, and more automobiles."

"But you mean to become a part of it all," Mendall said.

"Indeed, yes!" she exclaimed. "It is a place of possibilities, Señor. They point to a mile of buildings and tell me, 'Here, forty years ago, the Indians camped.' Or, 'Here, where the cars run, the buffalo made holes in the ground!' That seems wonderful to me. At first, here, it was all talk of 'growth'; now it is all talk of money and pleasure; soon it will be much talk of culture—and all in fifty years. Fifty years ago a little village—now a wide city. . . . Eh, it's a great place!"

Mendall had smiled; unconsciously or not, the speech was an imitation of MacAllister.

Several weeks of this sort of intimacy made Mendall hesitant. He was undecided in just what guise to paint Marie. He had been drawn away from his first conception of her, nevertheless it persisted, for it had laid a strong hold on him. She so often showed the qualities that would make her a superb Delilah; a glowing, compelling, feline courtezan. His conception still fascinated him. He was not so certain as he had been that Marie concealed a more than doubtful

past, but he was still convinced that she concealed something, and with consummate care. A woman who is bent upon concealment generally has some such secret to guard.

Mendall was a man of unalterable purpose where his work was concerned. If he decided to paint Marie in the guise that most appealed to him, he would hold to his purpose; even if it ended in his losing Marie. He feared that he would lose her; he hesitated.

It was a curious incident that decided him. One evening in looking through his possessions, he came upon a carved crucifix he had brought with him from Mexico. He hung it on the wall, meaning to show it to Marie. He knew that in spite of her silence she took a profound interest in his tales of the jungle. When he found she permitted it, he talked to her of his three years' experience as he never had to his wife. He knew that Marie had instantly understood the meaning of the Tehuana. She studied the painting somberly sometimes. When he had first seen Marie's fever-yellowed skin, he had accused her of having originated in the Isthmus, and he had defied her denial in his painting of the jungle-pool. The painting was locked away, but Mendall knew she had not forgotten it. It had given him a certain satisfaction to talk of the jungle while she listened somberly.

He pointed out the crucifix to Marie the next morning, but he was not prepared for what followed. Even across the room, Marie bent the knee to it, and crossed herself rapidly. She went toward it then, slowly, as

if compelled, and kneeling before it, prayed. Mendall could not catch the words, they were a murmur; her hands moved as if telling her beads. . . . She rose finally, and with a genuflection turned away. He saw her face then, grown gray and curiously immobile. She went to the couch and lay prone.

Mendall's amazement was too complete at first for movement, but he went at last and stood over her. She lay quite still. This was no acting; he had seen her face.

He touched her finally. "Marie?"

"Let me be," she said dully.

"Marie, if it means so much to you, why haven't you gone into Laclasse—to St. Cecilia's—to any one of the Catholic churches?"

She shrank, then drew herself up. "What is it to you, whether I pray or not?" she muttered sullenly.

She twisted herself off the couch and went to the door, looking not at him, but at the crucifix. Her face was still gray. She crossed herself before she shut herself out.

Mendall looked after her, then at the crucifix, and then he sat down on the couch, his brows still raised in surprise.

"Well, I never!" he said.

He sat for a long time in thought. If it were possible to accuse Marie of acting, he would have done so, but that was out of the question. She had not been acting, any more than she was when, several weeks before, she had paled at sight of the jungle-

pool. It had none of it been acting, Mendall decided. The Marie of the studio was Marie herself. A touch of bravado, perhaps, as if she said, "Here am I, myself—now what do you make of me?" but nothing more.

Mendall looked at the crucifix. "She was scared—frightened stiff by her conscience," he said, speaking aloud under the intense impression Marie had made upon him. "She looked like a Magdalen as she lay here. . . . I'll paint my first impression of her, no matter what comes!"

He went to the crucifix and took it down. "But we'll have no more of this," he muttered. "If she's badly enough scared she'll not dance at MacAllister's party to-night. She'll lie on her bed as she lay on the couch—her Scotch blood won't help her an iota. I doubt if she'll come here to-morrow."

XXXV

A DELILAH ON CANVAS

MARIE did dance at MacAllister's party, and gracefully, as all Laclasse testified. And she came to Mendall's studio the next morning.

She was late, for she had not appeared at breakfast. She came in with her usual undulating grace, took a cigarette and stretched herself on the couch. If she observed the absence of the crucifix, she showed no sign. Mendall noticed, however, that she wore about her neck the only ornament he had ever seen upon her, a small ebony cross attached to a threadlike chain of gold. He decided that her Scotch blood had helped her.

And Mendall received her as usual. "Tired?" he asked, as he lighted a match for her.

"*Non*—a little sleepy, only." She yawned before she put the cigarette to her lips.

"Did you enjoy your party?" Mendall continued, as he stretched his length in the low chair that was his usual seat.

"I enjoy everything my guardian does for me, Señor," she returned, with the yellow glint beneath

lowered lashes that was always a warning to him to be careful.

"What was the party itself like?" he asked.

"A collection of dull children who laughed much."

Mendall laughed. The characterization struck him as apt. "It lacked the zest of the Bal Bullier."

"One could scarcely expect French abandon at a Laclasse ball—Laclasse is probably the better without it," she returned drowsily. "It seems that Madame Kotany proposes a like party to be given in costume—you and your wife will be bidden to that, Señor."

"Where will she give it?" Mendall asked with interest.

"At the Country Club. Miss Bagsby comes this afternoon to discuss costumes with me." She was evidently not in a good humor, but there was a trace of amusement in her lazy tones when she added: "I hear some of the gossip, Señor—it seems that your friend, Madame Bagsby, had intended to charm Laclasse by the same device, but for some reason abandoned the project, and Madame Kotany fell upon it and made it her own."

"I'm glad I have had warning," Mendall said.

"But you will come, Señor?"

Mendall studied the epitome of indifference on the couch. He wondered if she was really so indifferent. It was she certainly who had secured invitations for him and Margaret. "Would it please you if I went?" It had struck him that to dance with Marie would be

a supreme joy. It was the first time he had permitted himself to be personal.

"Yes—if you dance well. Those children dance by rule; there is no inspiration in it."

Mendall made no answer, and she said nothing more. He sat looking at her, her slim length, the firm contour of her small pointed breasts, thinking of the painting he had decided to make of her. This was one of the occasions when she looked the part he had in mind, indifferent, languid, and yet so thoroughly alive.

Marie stirred, her hand outheld for another cigarette, and as she took it, he asked abruptly, "You have posed before, Señorita?"

"Yes."

"For whom?" Mendall asked sharply.

Marie looked at him from beneath her poised cigarette. "I lived in the home of a great artist, once, Señor. . . . But what is that to you?"

"How did he paint you?" Mendall demanded. He was thinking that to paint Marie clothed was an insult to her beautiful body. That if she had ever been a professional model, which was one of his surmises, no painter would have permitted it. The next moment he was frightened at his temerity, for his meaning had been clear.

To his surprise she sprang off the couch, and, with the astonishing quickness which she sometimes showed, caught up from a chair a length of white Mrs. Mendall had been hemming the night before, and with

deft fingers banded it about her face, gathered it beneath her chin and across her breast. With hands folded, she looked down on him.

"Thus, Señor . . . as a Sister of Mercy."

Mendall stared at her. She was perfectly the part, thoughtful brow, wide, lowered eyelids, firm mouth; rapt, meditative.

"What an actress you are!" he exclaimed.

"Will you paint me thus, Señor?" she asked softly; almost pleadingly. Her whole look had changed; indifference and sensuous languor wiped away.

"No! Something a deal truer of you than that!" It was a flash of defiance.

Marie unwound the white banding swiftly, and, throwing it aside, turned again to the couch. But before relaxing she stretched luxuriously, her arms lifted above her head. She stood a moment poised, looking down on him, her eyes agleam, her lip lifted in a slight smile, her expression of defiance: "As you will, Señor. If your knowledge of me approaches in profundity my understanding of you, you will indeed paint a wonder!"

Mendall's eyes swept her, an instant's survey, and then he was up and gripping her lifted arms.

"Keep it!" he commanded, in excitement. "Keep it!"

She pulled her arms from his hold. "Keep what?" she said furiously. "You shall not place hands on me!"

"Oh, *damn!* . . . Don't you understand? It's the pose I want!"

She stood a moment poised, looking down on him

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

He whirled about, seized the cover of the couch and drew it aside until it dragged on the floor. He caught up a pillow and flung it down at her feet. "Now, stand as you did a minute ago when you looked down on me! Imagine that thing at your feet is a man or a lion—anything you've captured—lying prone; imagine your feet kissed, if you like, only look down on it as you did on me!"

Marie stood with arms lax and chest heaving, looking at him.

Mendall eyed her steadily. "You have said to me, times out of number, if not in words in action: 'As you will, Señor.' Now—with your permission—I 'will,' Señorita."

She looked away from him, at the disarranged couch, at the object at her feet, assimilating his meaning; then at him again. From the tigerish fury in her eyes he was certain he had lost her. It held her for a moment, then was gone.

When she spoke it was quietly. "You think I deserve nothing better than that?"

"I can paint you only as I see you," Mendall returned determinedly.

She shrugged. "Merely a Delilah and her Samson! I supposed you more original," she said with limitless scorn. "But, *'as you will,* Señor.'"

Marie stood quietly while Mendall collected his materials; she even made a suggestion. "It would be best if you placed all this"—her gesture included herself—

"upon the dais, and you painted from a greater distance."

"You're right," Mendall agreed.

When he had chosen his light and placed her, she took the pose so perfectly that Mendall murmured his delight as he worked.

He sketched her in that day, while she looked down on him with smoldering eyes. Even in his absorption Mendall noticed that it was a long time before she breathed regularly.

XXXVI

VERY NATURALLY A WOMAN

IT was quite a different Marie who received Clare Bagsby that afternoon on the terrace, a semi-girlish vision in a loose cream-colored gown, with hair banded, and waist outlined by a gold cord.

Yet even with the June heat simmering about her, Marie had not discarded her favorite color; the ribbon that held her hair was red. But the green background of trees relieved the touch of vivid color; Marie Ogilvie had gowned herself with her usual artistry, Clare thought. The ache over her own plainness that sometimes dominated Clare's good sense, made itself felt as she looked at Marie's luxuriance. And there was also a deeper hurt tugging at Clare. It made her cordiality a little brusk.

"You're lovely, as usual," she said, in her downright fashion. "How you manage to wear red in your hair and have it becoming passes me. I don't dare let it touch me. Still, your hair is bronze—except when you stand under the light. I noticed last night whenever the electrics struck it, it was pure gold."

"But your hair is definitely red, a wonderful shade, and mine indeterminate," Marie returned gracefully.

"Your color should be a golden brown in winter and white always in the summer, as it is now—and by night always a green."

"Green! Why, I never had a green evening dress in my life!"

"Nevertheless it is your color."

"I can't believe it, but perhaps you're right. I met three of the girls down-town this morning, hunting colors for their costumes, and they'd already settled on the shades you said would suit them. They were raving about your taste. It was funny, last night, how you settled things for them—like a stage costumer. I decided I'd make my call promptly and persuade you to help me."

"I hoped that you would come—that the heat would not frighten you."

"You'll have no trouble, because you're beautiful, or what's better, you're unusual," Clare said in frank admiration, "but it's always a question with me. I haven't an idea what to put on for a costume dance in June. The stately things are too hot, and the peasant costumes are clumsy. Most of the girls will be flowers, or butterflies, lots of gauze and so on, but imagine me as a daffadowndilly or a butterfly!"

Marie was convinced that it was not concern over her costume that had brought Clare to her that hot day. But Clare's object would reveal itself. Marie entered with graceful zest into the question of costumes.

"I should want for you something quite original," she said.

"But what is there that hasn't been tried over and over again?"

Marie glanced at Clare. Clare was right, she was a difficult subject. She looked off thoughtfully, through the opening in the trees, through a gap in the hills, out to open country, acres and acres of wheat and corn.

"I should go as Nebraska!" she exclaimed.

"Nebraska!"

"*Oui*—just that out there!"—Marie pointed with a dramatic gesture—"I should have an underdress of satin exactly the color of a ripe ear of corn, and over it a thin green of the shade of unripe wheat. Your beautiful hair I should dress—so—wide on the sides and low on your brow, and band the whole with green wheat ears, a wreath made on little wires. The green overdress I should make beautiful, the hanging sleeves like the long pointed leaves of corn, the broad parts brought together at the shoulder. I should take an actual corn leaf as a pattern, and wherever I could, like beads, I should use grains of ripe yellow corn, a little line of them to outline a high corsage. I should string some as a necklace, use some as rosettes on my green shoes. And on my green gauze fan, I should have in letters of gold, 'Nebraska.' "

Though impressed, Clare laughed. "I'd look like a state fair exhibit!"

"Not if I stood before Miss Fuchs with a bludgeon while it became designed! . . . You desired originality. Yours would be the most remarked upon costume. The heart of every Nebraska man in the

room would warm to you. Every farmer who deposits in your father's bank would read of it with delight. . . . Flowers! Pouf!"

Clare's peal of laughter brought Mendall to the window above. And having been drawn from his work, he remained, looking down on this Marie, playing with another girl. For the time being, the thing he was painting seemed an unpardonable insult to Marie.

"And how will you go, wonderful person?" Clare asked, sobering.

"As a Spanish dancing girl."

"You'll be fascinating," Clare said. She looked away from Marie, for the hurt she had forgotten for a moment was tugging at her again. "It's going to be a pretty party," she said, a little absently. "Tables set outside, and lanterns strung all over the grounds. And it's the right kind of a party, the married set as well as the younger crowd. You'll meet a lot of people you haven't met yet." She looked at Marie again, with her father's kindly expression. "You know, I suppose, you're going to be a success—provided the women don't get down on you. No woman can do anything in an American town, if the women are against her. . . . If you manage right, you'll marry some nice Laclasse man—some day."

"It is best, of course, to marry," Marie returned judicially.

Her eyes had narrowed slightly. Her sure instinct told her that Clare Bagsby was approaching the object

of her call. If her look had not been so kindly, Marie might have taken her speech as a veiled threat.

"I wonder if you are as doubtful about marrying as I am?" Clare continued.

"How do you mean 'doubtful'? . . . Afraid that one's heart may be torn?"

"I don't know. . . . *Yes*—I suppose that's exactly what I do mean," Clare answered, flushing.

"You think much of marriage, then, Mademoiselle?"

Clare hesitated, then gathered decision. "I've thought of it pretty steadily for two years. . . . I have been engaged for a year—to Ellis Kraup."

"Ah, then I understand," Marie said softly. It was plain now—why Clare had come, and what troubled her. It seemed a strange thing to Marie—for a girl to come in this frank way to the woman who had fascinated her affianced; so wanting in finesse.

Clare went on steadily, though she had grown crimson. "I've been engaged and unengaged, and engaged again, to Ellis, for though he's wild sometimes, he's the only man I've ever loved. . . . I've managed to keep our engagement a secret—because—well, because I wasn't sure—about—what was best."

Marie thought of the letter from Ellis Kraup that was locked in her desk up-stairs, an impassioned letter, written after the dance the night before.

"I think this way of marriage," Marie said. "I think—if one loves enough—it is worth the trying. And even if one's heart is torn—as is frequently the case in time—one has at least clasped what one has

desired." She straightened into sudden impassioned earnestness. "Ah, Mademoiselle, it is well worth it! I say that to myself all the time: 'Why not have happiness for a little space at least?' Even if the world falls, can any one ever take away from you that little time of happiness? Ah, no! That is *yours!*"

Clare's eyes kindled, but she said, "There is so much to consider."

A faint smile dawned in Marie's yellow eyes. "Still we fight for the man of our choice. My judgment of the American woman is, that she considers much and does her own deciding—and ends in being very naturally a woman. And of the American man—that he pretends much without knowing it; the attitude of his women drives him to it. He also concludes in being very naturally a man. . . . So there it is!" She shrugged.

"You don't like American men, then?" Clare asked with interest.

"On the contrary I have a great liking for them. They live less by rule than the men I have known. . . . But, Mademoiselle, I became old when very young; I do not care for boys; they do not interest me. I do not even care to play with them a *little.*" The look Marie gave Clare was a very steady one.

Though confused, Clare nodded decidedly. "I believe women are growing to be better friends to one another," she remarked, with apparent irrelevance. "It was that feeling made me come out to see you. . . . I hope we are going to be real friends."

"That would give me pleasure," Marie returned. "Your face pleased me when I first saw it. . . . You speak of friendship among women, much as Miss O'Rourke."

"So you know Freda?"

"Yes."

"Poor Freda," Clare said with feeling. "Women haven't shown her much kindness—" She stopped, remembering MacAllister's part in Freda O'Rourke's tragedy.

Marie passed over Clare's significant pause. "It is with her more a hope of what will be among women, is it not? Quite a different state of things between men and women?"

"Yes—Freda's a feminist. I go to see her sometimes," Clare confessed. "It's been my talks with Freda that have made me think such a lot about marriage."

"Such talk moves me not at all, Mademoiselle. Women are not friends to one another—least of all regarding men. I think they never will be."

"In spite of our pact!" Clare said smilingly.

Marie did not smile. "Do not go away with too good an opinion of me, Mademoiselle Clare. You have, as you think, been frank with me. I shall be so with you: you have come to me because you fight for the man you love. And I—I am one of those who will steal—even a man—if I desired him sufficiently."

"I don't believe it. When it came to the point you'd do no such thing, because you've got brains enough to

distinguish between right and wrong. You're the kind would lie awake with a troubled conscience."

Marie's hand went to the cross at her throat. "Why do you say that?" she demanded, with her tigerish look.

"It's one of the things I've guessed about you—just as you've probably decided some things about me." Clare leaned over and kissed Marie's cheek. "I like you, you see, Marie Ogilvie; I don't know why, but I do."

Marie looked into Clare's face with the shrinkingly defiant gaze of the animal that hates to be touched, but under the steady kindliness of Clare's eyes, her own dropped and her lips quivered; Clare thought she was going to weep. But the next moment Marie had regained her composure. She shrugged. "Men become mad over me, and women stand back from me; it will be so even in Laclasse, I think, so I thank you for an unusual graciousness." She made the statement with her wonted grace and poise.

"Well, I am your friend. That's settled," Clare declared bruskly. "If I can do anything for you, ever, I will."

"Thank you," Marie murmured.

"And I hope you'll come and see me. I want you to meet my Dad—he's the best ever. . . . Will you tell Mrs. Mendall I came to see her, too?"

"She will be sorry she stayed so late at her school to-day."

"Yes, the colored woman told me. . . . Mrs. Mendall's an awfully good sort—I like her."

Marie said nothing. She went to the driveway with her guest, waving her an adieu as her car disappeared.

She went up to her room then, slowly, and shutting herself in took Ellis Kraup's letter from her desk. She shrugged as she sat down to write her answer, a charmingly worded note that gave him permission to come and walk with her over the Bellevue hills.

XXXVII

THE COSTUME DANCE

MRS. KOTANY'S costume dance was, as Clare Bagsby had said, a beautiful party, cleverly conceived and well carried out, favored by a spell of coolness and broadly smiled upon by the moon. The strings of Japanese lanterns looped about the veranda and hung from tree to tree were paled by the white light of the moon, as were the firefly gleams that dotted the grass slopes about the club house. There were those who between dances wandered out to the links, and here, too, firefly lanterns came and went.

As Clare remarked to Marie: it was a "good-by" party, for the following week feminine Laclasse went its various ways, some to eastern resorts, many to the Great Lakes, some to the Pacific Coast, leaving their menkind to summer bachelorhood in Laclasse. Mrs. Bagsby had changed her plans and was going east; Mrs. Kotany to her lakeside cottage; the Nasts to San Francisco.

"But you and I stay here," Marie said.

"Yes—I'm going to keep house for Dad," Clare answered, with a note of satisfaction. "We're going to have a beautiful time together."

"I am happy to stay here, also."

Clare thought that certainly something was making Marie happy. There was a subdued radiance about her to-night. They had come together for a moment on the lawn where the groups of arrivals were shaking hands and chatting. Marie was having her second introduction to Laclasse, in which the Mendalls were sharing. Marie certainly had reason to be pleased with the attention which was being shown her; it was quite evident that she was popular; she was already engaged for every dance with which she would consent to part. Still, Clare felt that it was not her social success alone that gave Marie her radiant look.

Clare had watched Marie keenly when the men had crowded about her. Her answer to Ellis Kraup was decided: "You may have one dance early in the evening," Clare heard her say. "I do not wish to dance much after supper." It was her answer to almost every one. Clare wondered for whom she was saving the latter part of the evening.

Ellis turned away and came at once to Clare's side. "Don't you forget—we have the first dance and the supper dance together, Tod, and all you'll give me between," he said gravely. He had called her by her pet name, and Clare flushed with pleasure.

Ellis kept by her side after that—until Mrs. Kotany called him away to meet a visiting girl. He was looking his best, Clare thought, graver than usual, less like a thoughtless boy. She was glad that he was slenderly built and brown, that he would never be huge and

florid like his father. His father had not been asked to Mrs. Kotany's party, the distinction frequently drawn between the first and second generation of the newly rich.

Clare continued to watch Marie. Marie had favored no one so far—not until Mendall with his quiet air of assurance drew her away from the laughing circle in which she stood, brilliant but unmirthful. It struck Clare for the first time that she had never heard Marie laugh.

Mendall stood, with head bent, talking to Marie, and as Clare watched them it struck her disagreeably that here might be the secret of Marie's radiance. Clare had often wondered if it would be possible for Marie to live under the same roof with Carl Mendall and avoid complications. She was the type to fascinate such a man as Mendall, and he was the sort to turn the head of almost any girl, handsome, daring and irresponsible. So far the women and girls Marie had met were dazzled by her, but she was certain very soon to have enemies; it would be a pity if it should occur to others that there was food here for gossip.

As she continued to watch them, Clare realized with consternation that she had never seen two people who appeared so completely suited to each other. Their costumes accentuated that something which proclaims a racial likeness: Marie in her Carmen dress and Mendall as a Spanish gipsy. Clare had always thought there must be a Latin strain in Carl Mendall, and in Marie it was unmistakable. To-night he was superbly Latin;

dark, carelessly arrogant, graceful. He was completely at ease in this collection of people, most of whom had hitherto been mere society names to him. He had walked up to Mrs. Bagsby who was delicately lovely in her bride-rose costume, and had asked for a dance. When she had refused—she could do nothing else than refuse with her husband's eyes on her—he had turned away with an air of complete unconcern which Clare knew was not assumed. He had secured what partners he wished, then, quietly waiting for his opportunity, had taken possession of Marie. As they stood together his gaze enveloped her, his artist's look of appreciation, and something more—something grave and intent.

He and Marie were so noticeable that others beside herself were watching them. Clare saw that her stepmother's eyes were fixed on them. She slipped away from the group of girls who surrounded her, and joined the two.

It was an interruption, and Marie gave Clare the narrow look Clare disliked. Mendall's brows came together, then smoothed, as soon as he noticed her costume.

"I wish I had painted you in green," he said, with genuine regret.

The remark struck Clare as so like him that she laughed. "I suppose we're all simply studies for your brush."

He glanced up at the subdued lights of the veranda topped by the low dark line of roof, then at the group-

ing of costumes on the lawn, their blended colors whitened by the moonlight and warmed by the red of many lanterns. "I should have said that no amount of artistry could transform these ordinary surroundings into something beautiful, but it's been done. I like this effect of cold and warm light." He looked down at Marie's costume. "You know, I suppose, Señorita, that you are the only touch of flame in the combination?"

"And your sash, Señor."

"True, Señorita—for once in my life I have forgotten myself." They spoke like people who knew and understood each other well.

"Where is Mrs. Mendall?" Clare asked, a little bruskly.

Mendall pointed her out. She stood near Mrs. Kotany, and Clare was glad to see that she was talking to her father in her pretty dimpled way. She was so small that she had to look up even at Bagsby. She looked as young as any girl there.

"How lovely she is to-night!" Clare exclaimed, in real admiration. "Like a little fairy. . . . Did you design her dress, too, Marie?"

"Yes, but under many difficulties. Her dignity objected to being a Titania, until Señor, here, begged that she be such."

"She was for declining until it entered her wise little head that it would be good policy to come," Mendall explained. "Then, Margaret-like, she swallowed her disdain of short skirts, and gossamer wings. I hope

it won't be dull for her—she doesn't know much about the new dances."

"We'll see she has a good time," Clare said in her kindly way.

Marie said nothing, but Mendall looked pleased. "That's good of you."

Clare knew that he was fond of his wife, and also that he was capable of forgetting her completely. He would probably dance every dance, for he was a superb dancer. She hoped he would not dance too often with Marie. The first long-drawn notes of a one-step had already broken up the groups about them; the dancing had begun.

Clare remained by Marie's side. "Isn't Mr. MacAllister coming to-night?" she asked.

"Yes—later."

"He doesn't dance, does he?" Clare had often wondered how MacAllister's saturninity managed to adapt itself to Marie.

"Dance! *Non!* My guardian has far too much sense to *dance!*" Marie exclaimed, with her usual quick loyalty.

"He seems to want you to be gay, though."

"Eh, perhaps! . . . Perhaps I am not so gay as I seem."

"Marie as she seems, and Marie as she is, are two different people," Mendall remarked coolly.

Clare expected Marie to give him her narrow look, but she did not. "And the real Marie is better than the seeming, is she not, Señor?" she asked lightly.

"She is and she isn't," Mendall returned.

"You are making progress, Señor!" she said, in the same faintly sarcastic way. "But now we dance!"

She whirled away from them with a pirouette that spread her flame red skirt as widely as a ballet girl's, and dipped in a courtesy before Mr. Kotany who, with Ellis Kraup, was descending the steps of the veranda. She was evidently going to have the first dance with their staid host, for she went away on his arm.

XXXVIII

"YOU KNOW ME NOT AT ALL"

ELLIS KRAUP was waiting for Marie when the time came for their dance. He sat on the veranda with Mrs. Mendall, and both were silent, for the most part, for they were both absorbed by their thoughts.

Mrs. Mendall had not been allowed to sit alone for a moment; her hostess had brought her partners, and so had Clare; but the evening had become merely a mechanical performance. She was thinking of Marie and her husband to the exclusion of everything else.

It had broken upon Mrs. Mendall with the force of a shock that Marie was fascinating. The girl who smiled over her fan and danced like an inspiration, who seemed to charm every one who came near her, was an astonishing revelation to Mrs. Mendall. The papers had called Marie Ogilvie charming, but she had not believed it possible. She had thought that Laclasse was simply entertained by Marie's peculiarities, and mindful of MacAllister's money. To her Marie was repellent; she had never been able to see her in any other light.

Mrs. Mendall had been amazed, and then, as she had watched Mendall and Marie make a marvelous thing of the hesitation waltz, there had come over her the conviction that Marie had fascination, and of a dangerous sort; of the sort that would appeal to Mendall; that would appeal to most men. Anxiety had taken hold on her. It would be a fearful thing if he became entangled with this girl! . . . And Mrs. Mendall realized, with amazement at her own blindness, that she had given the two every opportunity for intimacy. If her husband had escaped the spell Marie appeared to have laid on others, it had not been because he had been guarded. Of late she had been so happy, and so busy with her work in Laclasse, and Marie had been absent so much in the afternoons and evenings with MacAllister, that she had not even noticed whether her husband and Marie were as antagonistic as they used to be.

The evening had become a torment to Mrs. Mendall. She would be in misery until she could satisfy herself that she was simply frightened without reason. When she thought of the last happy six weeks, she was certain she was frightened without reason; when she watched the absorbed way in which Mendall danced with Marie, she felt that trouble was upon her again. Her throat tightened as she thought of the night when Mendall had come to her with promises that had lifted her out of misery into happiness. . . . It had been like her wedding night repeated. . . . She

looked somberly at Marie when she came out to the veranda.

Marie had danced every dance so far; no one had been able to secure even an interval with her in the moonlight. And now, as she came out of the ballroom, she was shrugging away Harmon Kent's suggestion that they go out to the links.

"Walk while the music is calling! Ah, no!"

When Ellis sprang up and eagerly claimed her, she had the same answer for him. "No—I do not wish to walk. After supper I may—now I am not tired."

She certainly looked unwearied as she stood playing with her fan. Exertion had not even flushed her creamy skin. The huge comb that fastened her mantilla had not shifted; she looked cool, unruffled—unlike Ellis who was warmly flushed.

He drew her aside. "You *must* come!" he said. "You won't see me, and you won't answer my letters. I can't endure it any longer!"

Marie lifted her fan to hide his face from Harmon Kent's curiosity. "I told you, it is quite useless," she returned decidedly.

"I'm going to tell Clare the truth to-night. You've got to hear me!"

Marie looked at him for a moment; then she furled her fan. "As you will."

They crossed the lawn and went down the slope to the links. When they reached the shadow of the big catalpa in the hollow, Marie stopped. "Now what is it you wish to say?" she demanded.

Ellis had grown very white. "What I've told you over and over again in my letters: that I love you, and that I want you to give me a chance. . . . I mean to be honest with Clare—I'm going to tell her the truth. . . . She's fine, Clare is; she wouldn't hold me a minute if she thought I really loved some one else. . . . And Clare's no cat; she wouldn't hold it against you if I tell her just how it's been. We grew up together, Clare and I, so I know just what she's like. We've always gone together, and our being engaged came about naturally. Clare sort of understood, too, always, when I didn't do right. She's kept me a good deal straighter than the fool kind of girl who, though she knows better, insists always on putting a halo about a fellow's head so he has to appear the angel he never is. I'm fond of Clare—I'll always feel she's my best friend—but it's never been the big thing I feel for you." His speech was boyishly profound in its sincerity.

"But I do not love you in the least—I never by any possibility could love you an iota," Marie said firmly.

"You say that out of consideration for Clare."

"You do me too much honor. I am no more an angel than you. What I long for I will have—in spite of everything. . . . You know me not at all."

"I don't care who or what you are—I love you!" Ellis reiterated passionately. "I mean to be free—so I can make you love me."

Marie drew an impatient breath, then continued

steadily. "And your father—what would he say? I am a Scotchwoman, am I not? I am Monsieur MacAllister's ward. I am of the enemy's camp."

Marie saw his face grow dark. "I don't take much stock in his—his prejudices," he said sullenly. "I told him so the other day. Father's terribly cut up over the war and the state of things. . . . But I'm not dependent on father—I have a business of my own." He changed to pleading: "Marie, you were nice to me in the beginning—before you knew about Clare. You let me come once; you wouldn't have done that if you hadn't cared a little—"

He tried to put his arms about her, but she twisted aside. "Will nothing convince you!" she said, in exasperation. "You force me to the truth! . . . I was, as you say, 'nice' to you in the beginning, because I was very certain that you had been set to discover all you could about me. I let you come, even after I knew about your engagement, because I wished to discover something from you, and I succeeded. You had listened to many ill conjectures about me, and you came on a voyage of discovery, and, in one short afternoon, fell in love with me. I am experienced, Monsieur—you are too impetuous and too honest a boy for such missions."

Ellis stood in crimson silence, and Marie observed his confusion for a few moments. She came closer then, her face lifted to his; the moonlight sharpened her features and deepened the shadows beneath her

eyes, making her look older, "experienced," as she had said. Even in his distress and confusion Ellis was reminded of the first time he had seen her—riding up Broad Street in MacAllister's car, haggard and thin-cheeked.

Marie spoke more gently. "I am sorry that I have hurt you, but I am fighting for something I wish very much to have. You were not sincere in the beginning. I think now you are, and because I wish you to understand what I mean when I say 'it is useless,' I will confide something to you: Monsieur Ellis, I love a man so utterly that my heart aches with it. I am both happy and in very great anxiety all the time. I have no right to my love—nevertheless I love completely." She lifted her hands and pressed them to her breast, a gesture dramatic in its intensity. Her voice had grown soft and thick: "It is all of me, Monsieur."

"Does he live here?" Ellis asked huskily.

Her hands left her breast, lifting in a lighter gesture. "Here or there—what does it matter!" she exclaimed, with more of her usual manner. "Monsieur Ellis, think no more about me. . . . And do not throw away the beautiful thing which you have. This madness for me! Pouf! It will burn out like a little candle."

Ellis turned and looked into the whitened distance. "If you care for somebody else, I suppose—it's—no use—" he said unsteadily.

"I have told you the very truth, Monsieur."

He gathered himself together. "We may as well go back. . . . I'll have to get through the evening —somehow."

They walked up the slope in silence.

XXXIX

LA DE LA GUARDA

MENDALL had seen Marie and Ellis go down to the links. When they came out from the shadow of the catalpa and started up the slope to the club house, he went to meet them.

"Mrs. Kotany has been looking for you," he said to Marie. "The next dance is the supper dance, and she wants ours to come afterward." He looked curiously at Ellis' white face, and then at Marie's expressionless calm.

"Has my guardian come?" Marie asked.

"No. Townley told me some time ago that MacAllister had telephoned to him to come into town. Townley said he would bring the limousine back for us after supper."

Marie paused abruptly. "Did he say my guardian was not coming?"

"No—only what I have told you."

Marie walked on in silence.

"Did you expect MacAllister to come before this?" Mendall asked.

"Yes."

Mendall studied her. He had learned to classify her

moods; she was unhappy. "You don't feel like dancing, do you?"

"How often does the girl who gambols upon the stage feel like doing it?" she returned bitterly. "It is a bit of stage effect Madame Kotany proposes."

"You can decline to do it!" Mendall said quickly.

As usual she read his thoughts correctly. "You would like me and my dancing to be confined to your studio alone, I suppose," she returned cuttingly.

Mendall realized that she was at her worst, and he glanced again at Ellis, who seemed to be entirely occupied by his thoughts, which, to judge from his expression, were not happy ones. The boy had not said a word since Mendall had appeared.

Marie turned to Ellis when they reached the veranda, and her voice lost its savagery. "I thank you for the walk we have had together," she said, with the sweetness she sometimes showed. "It was an honor. Mademoiselle Clare is my good friend, and as I know you are her best friend, you must always be mine also."

Ellis' muttered answer was indistinct. He wrung Marie's hand before he escaped from the lights of the veranda. Mendall guessed accurately the meaning of Marie's speech. He was glad Ellis Kraup had been given a decided answer; he hated the popularity that was making Marie much sought after. As Marie had said, he wanted to keep her to himself.

Marie turned now to him. She shook her shoulders as if to rid herself of an oppression. "And now,

Señor, let us go in and dance to the very end this gliding thing that is calling to us. I want motion—I have stood too long in the moonlight."

Mendall laughed a little excitedly as he swept her in among the dancers. He had passed his wife and Harmon Kent without seeing them, and had brushed by Mrs. Bagsby, who stood in the doorway, without a glance for her. But Marie had seen them both. She met Mrs. Mendall's pinched look steadily; to Mrs. Bagsby she gave a slight smile. Whenever they passed her in the dance, Marie took occasion to execute some one of the intricately graceful movements with which she seemed to be familiar. She and Mendall improvised as if with one brain. They were by far the most original couple on the floor. Marie danced with the ease of a professional, and carried Mendall with her.

Mrs. Kotany nodded and smiled at them as they danced, then went out to the veranda. She wore the look of the pleasantly preoccupied hostess. "Oh, here you are, Harmon!" she said. "I've been looking for you. . . . Just as soon as this dance is over, before they go out to the tables, will you get the center of the floor and announce in your beautiful baritone—that Miss Ogilvie and Mr. Mendall have consented to dance the fandango for us before we go out to supper? . . . The orchestra's been coached, it'll tune up right away, and then we'll see something worth while!" She laughed when she saw Harmon Kent's look of surprise: "Miss Ogilvie promised me in the beginning

she'd do it, if I got her a partner, and Mr. Mendall's been lovely about it, so it's all right. . . . Now, you do your part—will you, Harmon?"

"I'll be delighted. . . . Just like you to invent a surprise like this."

She received smilingly the credit which really belonged to Blanche Bagsby. "That's splendid of you. Don't let anybody get out-of-doors before you make your announcement. I'm going to tell the people out here," and, with a whole-hearted smile for Mrs. Mendall, she hurried off.

"That's just like Sarah Kotany!" Kent said to Mrs. Mendall. "She is the best entertainer in Laclasse, and manages to be an all-around good sort at the same time. She deserves her popularity. . . . But why didn't you tell me what was doing?"

Mrs. Mendall did not say that she had been as ignorant as he. She was burning with something that hurt more than anger, yet she smiled. "You were just told that it was a secret."

The dance was over, and squaring his shoulders, Kent went to make the announcement. He liked to be spectacular—as Mrs. Kotany well knew.

There was silence, when he called for it, and after his speech a hum of voices and a scramble for standing space against the walls. Those who were outside filled the windows. Marie and Mendall were left together in the center of the room.

It was Marie who gave the signal to the musicians, an upflung arm and a sharp rattle of her castanets.

When they caught up the lively triple time and swung into full measure, she and Mendall whirled apart, bowed, gravitated to each other again, coquetted over their proximity, parted and again sought each other. Marie escaped and he followed; she danced for him, drew him, then eluded him, the click of their castanets now sounding a call, now a defeat, now triumph.

Despite its Spanish liveliness, the fandango is fundamentally oriental; it was the Moors who brought it into Spain. Under Marie's handling it became supremely the dance of courtship. Whether spun from her own brain, or an adaptation of some subtle stage version with which she was familiar, its oriental quality gained significance. Mendall danced with Spanish-American grace and abandon, as he danced the fandango in the Isthmus, but, as they continued, he unconsciously yielded to Marie's sway. He grew intent, utterly absorbed by his partner, the fire of demand growing in his eyes, the warmth of pursuit in his cheeks. It was no longer play with him; he was completely, emotionally absorbed.

Mendall lost himself in the dance; Marie did not. She danced with an oriental subtlety tinctured with true savagery. Her face, with its drooping eyelids and shut lips, had all the immobility of the Indian. It was her body that spoke; with it she ran the whole gamut of emotions. The frankly American girls who watched her quivered, they did not know why, and the conventionally experienced woman, like Mrs.

Bagsby—who, if she could, would reduce man-capture to a science—because of the sheer primitive beauty of Marie's rendition, felt a stir of antagonism that amounted to hatred. And there was not a man in the room whose color did not rise; there were many who were conscious of shortened breath.

And yet to no one, man or woman, not even to Mrs. Mendall, who grew white under the ordeal, did Marie's dancing convey an offense; to many, stirred emotions; to some, envy; to one or two, a passion of jealousy; but to no one the tincturing of disgust that is always the result of mere suggestiveness. Marie was expressing woman's drawing power too subtly and too beautifully. She was too truly the artist. Even from the reluctant she extracted admiration.

And in spite of her apparent absorption Marie showed that she had the subtle actress' instinct for effect. She gaged her audience accurately; she did not allow surprise to degenerate into criticism. With a whisper to Mendall that brought them together with left hands clasped and right arms lifted for a final rattle of their castanets, she brought the dance to an end.

They stood then, motionless, hands gripped, until the music stopped; and then, before the room was upon them, hand in hand, led by Marie, they made a dash for the open.

They had a few moments together on the lawn before the laughter and chatter of the ballroom poured

out upon the veranda in search of them. Mendall was still so held by emotion that he was panting and speechless; he still gripped Marie's hand.

But Marie was not looking at him. She stood with chest heaving and restless eyes searching the veranda. She looked at and through the groups that were approaching. When a club attendant ran down the steps ahead of the oncoming crowd, and hurried up to them, her face lighted.

"Ah, he comes to tell me!" she said softly.

She pulled her hand from Mendall's and went to meet the boy. Mendall followed her mechanically. "Mr. MacAllister has come?" she asked quickly.

"I don't know 'um," the boy said. "A messenger boy brought this while you was dancing," and he gave her a note.

Turning her back on the crowd, Marie tore open the envelope. Mendall felt rather than saw her stiffen, and, before her hand crushed the paper, his downward glance saw the Spanish words which were so boldly printed that they were easily legible:

LA DE LA GUARDA

Marie stood quite still, looking down at the crushed paper in her hand, and Mendall saw the gray tint creep over her face and throat, turning her ashen. He could not guess the meaning of the note, but Marie's terror sobered him completely.

"What is it? . . . Anything wrong with Mac-

Allister?" he asked hurriedly, for the foremost group from the veranda had almost reached them.

Marie turned stiffly. Her lifeless look passed over him and went to meet the laughing congratulations that were fairly upon them. Even her lips were colorless, the curious leaden hue one sees sometimes in the face of a terrified mulatto.

"I think—he will not come," she said, in the same hushed way in which one says: "He is dead."

XL

THEY NONE OF THEM SPOKE

IT was a silent party of three MacAllister's limousine conveyed to his house in Dunkirk a little after two in the morning. It had been arranged several days before that Marie and the Mendalls were to spend what remained of the night, after the dance, at MacAllister's house.

They had left Mrs. Kotany's party still dancing. Marie had pleaded weariness, and the Mendalls' excuse for leaving was the early start they must make for the country.

Mendall was only vaguely conscious of the two hours that had passed since the rush of congratulations and comments had carried Marie away from him. At supper they had sat at different tables. He had danced afterward, mostly with his wife, for in a secondary way it had struck him that she looked white and miserable. He had blanched Mrs. Bagsby's cheeks by a threat when, evidently unable to resist the feminine impulse, she had flung an insinuation at him regarding Marie. "Repeat that to me or any one else and you'll regret it as long as you live!" he had flung back at her, and she had cowered. When the limousine came for them, driven not by Townley, but by a

boy from some down-town garage, he had questioned him and learned that the boy knew nothing of MacAllister's whereabouts, that a telephone message to the garage had put him in charge of the limousine. All these occurrences had been simply a part of the vagueness of the two last hours.

What stood out clearly was Marie's face, gray, still, as she sat at supper; white and immobile as she danced first with one and then another; and her lifeless air when she refused to dance with him; *"Non,* we have danced enough together," she had said. "I wish to go. When the limousine comes, let us go quickly." His thoughts had circled intently and continuously about Marie. It was the absorbing interest of the last weeks intensified, developed by the emotional strain of the evening into a veritable passion.

And as he sat now opposite Marie and his wife he did not take his eyes from Marie. The moon still made things clear; Marie was dead white. She had paused when she saw that it was not Townley who held the door of the limousine for them, but she had asked the boy no questions. She did not speak once during the drive city-ward. Nor did Mrs. Mendall. They none of them spoke. Mrs. Mendall sat gathered into her corner, and Marie was motionless, with eyelids dropped so low that her eyes were a mere gleam. Mendall knew she was suffering, and that, for some reason he could not fathom, both her terror and her hurt were connected with MacAllister. He set his teeth on the certainty.

It was the Chinaman who opened the door to them; a queer, slit-eyed, yellow creature he was in his long bluish coat and pointed shoes.

Marie's eyes swept the hall and the vista of dimly lighted library, and then fastened on the Chinaman. "Is—Monsieur MacAllister here?" she asked in a voice that was thicker than usual, as if she was breathless.

"No, he go way—out of town."

"When?" Marie asked quickly.

"To-night. He eat dinner and go out. He not come back. He telephone he go way."

"What time did he telephone?" Marie asked in the same eager way.

" 'Bout middel of the night."

Marie stood looking at him blankly, as if some overwhelming fear of hers had been confirmed. Then her lips began to quiver: "But—he told you to tell me 'He go away'? He left—a message for me?" It was begging for the answer she knew she would not get.

The Chinaman's eyes widened. Even Mrs. Mendall, deep as she was in her own thoughts, was infected by a sense of disaster.

The Chinaman shook his head. "No. He say only he go way quick, and I keep house."

Marie turned to the stairs; then, as if asking a question to which she already knew the answer, she said, almost with indifference: "Townley has not come back, either?"

"He not been here since he take you out to the club."

Marie said no more. She climbed the stairs slowly, as if tired; as if she had completely forgotten that any one was with her. The Chinaman looked after her and then at the Mendalls, his narrow eyes grown brilliant. He bowed and hesitated, his oriental mind confused for a moment as to just what was his duty. But evidently he decided that the host's part devolved on him, for he bowed again:

"You come up-stairs," he said. "I show you loom," and he slid like a shadow past Marie's slow ascent.

He hovered at the top of the stairs until they came up, and pointed out their rooms with a succession of little bows.

Marie seemed to have roused to a realization of their presence, for she spoke now. "It is late—I hope you sleep well," she said evenly. "I am very tired."

"Will you be going out with us in the morning?" Mrs. Mendall asked. It was of the future she was thinking. She looked very small and white and yet determined as she stood before Marie.

Marie did not answer for a moment. "I think, if you go early, I shall come later," she said finally.

"If you wait here you may have some word from MacAllister," Mendall said, with a touch of dryness.

Marie turned her eyes on him, a vague look. "He has gone for a few days on business. He often goes so—in haste," she answered, in the same even way. "I say good night now," and she shut herself in her room.

XLI

MRS. MENDALL TELLS A SECRET

"WHAT is it, Carl—has anything happened to Mr. MacAllister?" Mrs. Mendall asked, as soon as their door had closed on them.

"I don't know," Mendall replied.

"Marie seems so terribly anxious."

"I don't know what the trouble is. Marie Ogilvie is not altogether easy to understand."

"But she is fascinating—I realized that to-night."

"Laclasse seems to think so. She certainly dances marvelously. I confess she stirred me by her dancing. I haven't cooled off yet."

Mendall was on his guard. He spoke in the careless tone he always adopted when forced to discuss Marie with his wife. He would think of nothing else than the riddle that called itself Marie Ogilvie until he saw her again, that was habitual, but he did not want to talk about her. He was doubtful whether he could keep himself in hand. He knew from Margaret's manner during all the latter part of the evening, and the undercurrent of alarm in her last speech that his dance with Marie had aroused her anxiety and jealousy. She had put to flight every woman with whom

he had ever played. He *couldn't* lose Marie. He was desperately anxious that she should not suspect.

The spacious room the Chinaman had assigned to them was whitened by the moonlight; the lights at the dressing-table were too heavily shaded to overcome it, and Mendall tried to avoid further talk by going to the window. "What a night!" he said.

Mrs. Mendall said no more. There were things she meant to say, but they must wait a little. Their hand-bags with their night clothes and a change for the morning stood on the rack, and she went to them and began to unpack rapidly. She did not disturb Mendall by even a remark until she had taken off her gauze dress and wrapped herself in her kimono. Then she came to his side.

"I have put your things out, dear," she said.

"Have you—" Mendall returned absently. "I don't seem to want to sleep."

He was wondering what Marie was doing: lying prone on her bed without even having removed her huge comb, probably; possibly walking the floor, as she so often did when she was waiting for MacAllister. Then he roused a little:

"I didn't know this place had such a view."

"It will be beautiful when the trees have grown," Mrs. Mendall answered.

"The moon keeps at it, doesn't it?"

Its pale light reigned supreme still, though preparing to melt into the pinky gray of dawn. The house stood on a knoll, and their room was in the front, with a

view of graveled driveway, slopes of clean-cut lawn, darkened here and there with shrubbery and young trees. Beyond were stretches of distance, marked by an occasional new house. There were only a few tall trees. Dunkirk had originally been a village, as old almost as the town of Laclasse, but the residence streets of the city had reached out and enveloped it. Now it was a part of Laclasse, and all this that lay before them was MacAllister's enterprise, an addition to Dunkirk.

"It will be a beautiful place," Mrs. Mendall repeated, "and Mr. MacAllister is preparing to leave it to Marie."

Mendall gathered himself together for the scene which seemed unavoidable. He put his arm about his wife's shoulders and drew her to him; he had often escaped disagreeables by a show of affection—which, to do him justice, was rarely a pretense. And it was not to-night. His feeling for his wife, and his fever over Marie, were two entirely different things. If forced to explain he would have said that a man frequently loves two women at the same time.

"Well, Marie is fortunate," he said lightly.

"She is both fortunate and very unfortunate," Mrs. Mendall continued steadily. "I have never told you all I know about Marie, Carl."

He looked down on her grave determination. "What do you mean?" he asked in a changed voice.

"You know I told you the first night she came to us

that I was certain she was Alexander MacAllister's daughter?"

"Yes. You've always insisted that she was, but I've thought differently."

"Because I didn't tell you everything. . . . I told you I knew her mother—that we were at the same school. We were great friends, Carl. I was terribly homesick, and she was lovely to me. I was only fourteen and a little girl, and she was eighteen. She mothered me; I adored her. She was so gay and so beautiful—much prettier than Marie—not so strange looking. Though Marie's features are not like MacAllister's, there is a resemblance in her to him. Marie shows that she is part Scotch, both in her face and in her manner. Sometimes she is like MacAllister, cool and calculating. Eugenie was a gay, affectionate, irresponsible creature, I know that now, but I was not so good a judge of character at that time. Marie has her mother in her too; certain characteristics.

"I told you Eugenie married MacAllister. Her father was a Frenchman. He had been a cotton planter. He married a New Orleans girl, and when Eugenie was a child he took his family to Paris. He died there, and by some chance Eugenie was brought back to New Orleans, and either some relative or friends sent her to New York to school. But before she came she had met MacAllister. He was wildly in love with her, and she with him. She told me her New Orleans connection had sent her north to get her away from him. She used to cry over his letters and

tell me she was not going to marry him. But he followed her. They were married secretly in New York, and he took her to Mexico.

"I was tremendously impressed by it all. For some reason she chose to write to me, all about her life in Mexico, and how happy she was. But in a little over a year the break came. There was a fearful estrangement. She wrote me MacAllister had been brutal to her. I hated him for her sake. Either she went of her own accord back to her connections in Paris, or he sent her there, and her baby with her. For a long time I didn't hear from her; then she sent occasional letters, and I used to write long letters in return. I really loved her. She didn't tell me much about herself, just that she was with friends, but she always mentioned her little girl. . . . Then came the final letter. She said she was very ill. I think she was dying, for I never heard from her again. I think before she died she wanted to tell me the truth; she wanted to confess herself. . . . It was a shock to me. . . . She told me, Carl, that her mother had been an octoroon. She had married MacAllister and not told him. When he found it out he would not live with her. She asked me to keep her secret—that in Paris there was not the bitter prejudice there is here; that her French friends would care for her child."

Mendall said nothing for a time. He looked down on his wife with brows lifted and lips slightly apart, more a look of complete amazement than consternation.

"And Marie—" he stopped.

"She has the same blood in her as Lucy," Mrs. Mendall said clearly. "It shows in her far more than it did in her mother. . . . Lucy feels it, though she does not know it, and resents it, and though I have tried my best, Marie is utterly repellent to me. She shows that she is a *savage*. Carl, Eugenie showed it too, in a more light-hearted and careless way—there wasn't the Scotch blood in her to make her glum like Marie, but she had the same passion for color; for reds and yellows. And she used to sit around in the sun just as this girl does. . . . I have never liked Mr. MacAllister, I think he can be ruthless. And one can't like a man who is so calculating that he is afraid to own his own child; now that the war has driven Marie to him he hasn't the courage actually to call her his own; he wants to get around a lot of difficulties by simply adopting her. I don't like him, nevertheless I pity him from the bottom of my heart. I would not be responsible for that girl's future for twenty times Alexander MacAllister's money." She spoke with passionate earnestness, her unconquerable aversion to Marie apparent in every word.

"It accounts for—a good deal. I have always felt there was primitive blood in her—and that she knows it—" Mendall said slowly, "still—" he stopped again.

Mrs. Mendall felt that her husband was trying to consider what she had told him in an impersonal way, and she was a little ashamed of her own warmth. "I have really tried to like Marie, Carl. I have tried

hard, for her mother's sake, but from the very beginning my secret knowledge got in the way. I am afraid my prejudices are very deeply rooted. I have often wondered whether it would have been possible for me to have loved Eugenie, if I had known. Even as a little girl I don't believe I could have done it. Even if Marie were gay and lovable like her mother, I think my feeling of repulsion would have been the same. I should have been sorry for her—I have been sorry for Marie, terribly sorry at times—but I don't believe that in any case I could have loved her. And perhaps Marie has instinctively felt my repulsion, and that is the reason she has kept herself a sealed book to me. It is a *fearful* thing to have her inheritance, and I am genuinely sorry for her and her father. They are neither of them to blame for her being."

Mendall was not thinking of what she was saying. He was trying to adapt his many surmises and his discoveries to this revelation. . . . It explained Marie. And it explained MacAllister.

But Carl Mendall was not shocked. He was simply very much surprised and interested. And he knew instantly why Margaret had parted with her secret. She had been driven by alarm to take what would appear to her an effective measure. She counted upon his having the same feeling of repulsion that she had. She had no suspicion of his love for the primitive; he had never horrified her by unnecessary revelations.

Mendall had no feeling of repulsion, because he had

no prejudices. He had told Marie the truth when he had said that all nationalities were much the same to him. He had been fascinated by the mixed people of the Isthmus. In fact he had a much higher regard for the Tehuana who had ruled over his Isthmus cook-house than for Mrs. Bagsby's sort. The Tehuana was a woman; Mrs. Bagsby a warped product of civilization.

He was not in the least shocked. On the contrary, as soon as he recovered from surprise, he had a feeling of relief. This then was the explanation of Marie's devotion to MacAllister, and his love for her; the thing that had tormented him. . . . He drew a long breath: this set Marie definitely apart; out of the reach of suitors. No wonder she looked unhappy as she had walked between Ellis Kraup and himself. No wonder she had been pallid and then enraged when he had shown that he suspected her secret. He had been right from the beginning; she had dark blood in her. He was glad the mystery was cleared. It brought her closer to him. He was probably the only man she would ever know to whom it would make no difference.

Mendall had never actually lied to his wife about anything or anybody, perhaps because she had never made it necessary for him to lie. But he determined, swiftly, that he would lie if she drove him to it; he would do anything rather than return to the maddening blank which Marie's coming had filled.

He asked a question to which he knew the answer, simply to be saying something: "Why didn't you tell me all this before, Margaret?"

"I was so very certain that you disliked her, Carl, and I didn't want to prejudice you still more. I couldn't see how any one could like her. But to-night I realized that she would be dangerous to almost any man. I thought you ought to know. Any man who is drawn by her is courting tragedy."

"That's true enough. I've always thought her dangerous."

His cool discussion of Marie brought Mrs. Mendall some relief. It did not completely satisfy her, she had been too terrified. Most wives would have asked the direct questions that most husbands, for peace's sake, must answer with falsehoods. But not Margaret Mendall. She would repeat her warning and wait. "I think Mr. MacAllister loves her, Carl. I think it was mostly pity at first, but these last weeks she has got close to his heart. . . . He is the kind that would annihilate any man who trifled with her."

Mendall held steadily to his coolness. "He would, I think. But Marie hasn't struck me as the to-be-trifled-with sort. She's struck me as pretty thoroughly mistress of herself." He pointed to the mixture of white light and pink dawn: "We've talked till morning, Margaret—I've cooled off—I'm tired."

"Are you, dear?" She reached up and drew his head down to her, and her voice suddenly grew unsteady. "It makes me ill all over when I am anxious

about you. I believe no mother ever loved her boy more than I love you. . . . I have often wondered how it would be if I—if we had a child? . . . Would you love it—Carl?"

She felt his cheek grow scarlet. "I suppose I should," he said indistinctly. "I don't know. . . . I suppose I'm wanting in some ways. Perhaps it's just that I'm a brute. Perhaps I've some of Marie's dark blood in me. . . . Whatever I am, I can't help it. I know I wasn't meant for anything as good as you are."

"Hush!" she said.

He lifted his head with a sudden passionate gesture. "One thing I do know: if I can't paint, I'll go under! I'm capable of doing anything when the fear of becoming a mere school drudge takes hold on me! If I'm to be deprived of what little inspiration comes my way, I'll end by doing something desperate!"

XLII

STORM CLOUDS

MRS. KOTANY'S party undoubtedly gave pleasure to many, but to the Mendall household it had brought acute suspense. The little house beneath Twin Oaks Hill was permeated with anxiety and unrest.

Marie had remained in town for most of the day following the dance, but evidently her stay had afforded her no relief, for she came back looking haggard and worn. "Monsieur MacAllister has not yet returned," she told Mrs. Mendall, and then withdrew into an unapproachable silence.

But her anxiety and restlessness communicated itself to every one in the house. Even the mulatto woman was attacked by unrest, for she left without giving warning. Possibly it was Marie's tiger-like pacing of the room opposite her own that made her uneasy. Mrs. Mendall was not surprised when Lucy failed to return from Laclasse on the Sunday morning following Mrs. Kotany's party. For two months the woman had smoldered under the necessity of submission to one of her own kind; this result was natural.

Mrs. Mendall was glad of the excuse to remain

closely at home for a time. Just what would come of the agony of suspense that appeared to be riding Marie, she could not tell, but MacAllister's return would certainly bring a change of some sort. She was thinking in her silent yet intense way of the future. The passionate exclamation which had closed her talk with her husband on the night of the dance worried her. The old unrest seemed to have taken possession of him again, for he had begun to roam the country. He spent only short intervals in his studio, certain sign that he was in his blackest mood. He was affectionate to her, but silent, and she felt that it was best not to question. She felt certain that Marie's distress was responsible for his gloom. He had taken very calmly what she had told him of Marie's inheritance; he had not referred to it since, but it must have been a shock; particularly if he had come to look upon Marie as an "inspiration." Mrs. Mendall could not forget that sudden passionate exclamation of his.

After hours of painful thought that set shadows beneath her eyes, Mrs. Mendall decided that, even if she had to make the suggestion herself, Marie must leave their house. When MacAllister returned he must find another home for her. She was glad when Marie of her own accord suspended her drawing lessons. It left Mendall without occupation and a prey to restlessness, but that was preferable to his having the girl in his studio.

"I think, Madame, I shall not be in the studio for

a time," Marie had announced, on the one occasion when she had appeared at the breakfast table. "I do not feel well."

"I am sorry. Is there nothing we can do for you?" Mrs. Mendall had returned politely.

"Thank you, Madame, I wish only to be alone," Marie had replied, and as if the mere effort of speaking had strained her endurance to the breaking-point, she had muttered, "Pardon—" and had left the table.

Mendall had said nothing. He looked neither at his wife nor at Marie. He finished his breakfast hurriedly and went out for one of his interminable walks. He was waiting in almost intolerable suspense for MacAllister's return.

Mendall was enduring the foretaste of what life without Marie would be. His wife's quiet manner did not deceive him; she was wretched and yet determined. That watchful guardianship of him that had put to flight every woman with whom he had played was on the alert. His hot exclamation had undone him. Marie would be removed from him—unless Marie refused to be eliminated. But what hope was there of any solution as long as she was in the grip of an anxiety that seemed to be driving her mad?

Mendall waited and from a distance watched Marie. She had returned to the habits of the first two weeks she had spent with them; she lived in her room or out-of-doors. But she never went out of sight of the house. She sat always where she could see the driveway. When night came she made Mendall think

of a newly caged animal. Her light footsteps padded about over his head, circling and recircling the four walls of her room, until, driven wild with restlessness, he would catch up his hat and go out. She seemed to be stirring at all hours of the night. Did she never sleep? Mendall forgot himself sometimes in anxiety over her. She would break if this sort of thing continued.

On Monday afternoon, the fourth day since Mrs. Kotany's party, Mendall had gone out. Marie was shut up in her room, and though the heat was appalling, Mrs. Mendall seized the opportunity to go into Laclasse. She must secure another maid and she wanted also to inquire about MacAllister. To her other acute anxieties was added the fear that, if things went on as they were, Marie would be seriously ill. The girl ate almost nothing, and Mrs. Mendall guessed that she slept as little. Her husband appeared to have gone for one of his long tramps; Mrs. Mendall made her preparations and went without a word to anybody.

Mendall had not gone for a walk; it was too hot for that. Even the dry furnace-like breath panted from the lungs of the Great Desert had died so completely that, emboldened by the stirless calm of its enemy, the blue haze had crept up from the Missouri, up the sightly slopes of Laclasse and the hills of Bellevue, and had mingled with the deadly glare of the sun. Mendall had gone down into the ravine, which still held a little of the coolness collected during the last week. Yet even in his retreat he felt the oven-

like heat grow intolerably moist and thick. The banked clouds, though they hung low, were still too fleecelike to be sullen, but at any moment they might scowl blackly, writhe and twist, swoop down and smite. All nature seemed to be standing still in hot apprehension of the thing that might strike—or pass on down the great thoroughfare of storms, the great Mississippi Valley.

Mendall was reminded of the breathless hush of the tropics, the lull before an outbreak of fury—and of Marie. Everything in nature reminded him of Marie. . . . He had lain on the ground for two hours, almost motionless, and yet every nerve in him was jumping. . . . He got up, finally, and with eyes lifted to Marie's windows, climbed the terrace. If there was a storm coming he would watch it from the studio. Marie would probably be in the room above him, watching it from her windows.

XLIII

BENEATH THE TIGER'S COAT

THE house was dark and still when Mendall came into it; Mrs. Mendall had drawn every blind. His studio was also dark, and groping to the end of the room, he opened two of the casement windows.

"Señor—" a soft thick voice behind him said.

Mendall whirled. "You, Marie!"

She sat on the couch, among the heat of the pillows. He came swiftly and stood over her. "So you've come at last?"

"Yes—I have wished to come."

He sat down beside her, impetuously, but she drew herself together. "Your chair will be better, Señor."

Mendall heeded the warning; he looked at her from a distance. Even in the half light he could see that she was heavy-eyed and leaden-hued.

"You're ill, Marie."

"No, Señor, only very unhappy."

"Tell me what it is," he begged.

"It is not a thing of which I can speak."

"I will keep it—faithfully."

"A man—or woman—who will deceive once, will do so again." She did not speak scornfully; simply as stating a fact.

Mendall flushed. He had no answer.

"I do not say that to hurt you," Marie continued. "It is probably what will be said to me. If it is, I shall have only my deserts."

Mendall was too excited to ask her what she meant. He was too eager over the thing which was all-important to him. "You're going to come after this—just as you have? If you want to come, no one can prevent it."

"Circumstances may prevent, Señor. Though from the beginning there has been a quarrel beneath our friendship, I have enjoyed coming. It has been home to me in your studio. I am accustomed to studios, and the strangenesses of artists. You have great talent; I have known that from the beginning, also. If I can not come I shall be sorry, but my future is uncertain."

"Have you come to say good-by?" Mendall asked thickly.

"No, not that. I hope not that. I am only waiting. It has been hard—to wait—" Her voice faltered as it had when she pleaded with the Chinaman for a message from MacAllister.

"When MacAllister comes will you know?" Mendall demanded.

"Yes."

Mendall drew a quick breath. "The Lord bring him then! . . . Marie, I've been like a habitué without his opium, these four days."

She studied him for a moment. Then she said, with

conviction: "Yes, it is like that with you—that and nothing more."

Mendall was beside her on the instant. "It's everything, Marie! I was going under when you came! Without you—"

Though she caught her breath, Marie put his arms away determinedly. "Be silent, Señor! I know perfectly how it was with you, and I can see how it will be! I did not come for such talk. . . . I wish to see that thing you have painted of me. I came for that."

Mendall got up and walked the floor in his effort for self-control. Marie put her hands to her eyes and pressed them, as if either they ached intolerably, or she wanted to shut out the sight of his aimless movements.

Mendall came back to her finally. "Do you want to pose?" he asked, in a voice he tried to make even.

"I wish only to see the painting," she repeated steadily. "It is late afternoon; it would not be possible to paint in this light."

"Very well."

Mendall brought it from the closet and placed it. He raised the shades of the north windows. The clouds had darkened, massing to hide the red-gold sunset which was on the way. It turned the world queerly yellow; made the greens without unnaturally vivid.

It deepened the golden tints in the thing he had painted. Hair, eyes, flesh, were aglow; one felt the yellow tint of the body through the russet sheath im-

posed upon it; even to the blood-red cover of the couch the storm light gave golden tints. The thing was very completely Mendall's conception of a half-breed Delilah, a golden woman with arms lifted, head thrown back, and bust triumphant; her lip curved in a slight smile, and her eyes lowered to a yellow gleam, sleepily intent, sensuously, luxuriantly alive. And it was Marie—as one might easily imagine she would be; as many would judge her to be.

Mendall had done his work boldly and yet subtly, exultant in his conception, tender in his handling of color. He had succeeded in eliminating crudities. It was the best work he had ever done, and he knew it.

As he drew back from the painting, he was caught away from his excited thoughts by the velvety richness the queerly yellow light gave to the flesh tints. "Jove! It ought to be hung under a skylight darkened by yellow!" he muttered. "This light would make the flesh tints of a white woman—bluish—ghastly—" He stood for a time, meditating on light effects, completely forgetful of Marie.

But Marie had heard. She lifted a little, looking at him; then at the painting, then at him again, steadily, her hand opening and closing as if on a weapon.

But she said nothing. She got up slowly and came to his side.

"You see what this light does to her flesh?" Mendall said, still intent on the painting. "I'd like to get just that overlaying of softness and warmth with my brush—"

"Yes, I see."

Mendall turned quickly to look at her, galvanized by the way in which she spoke the three words. Even when he saw the glare in her eyes he did not realize the significance of what he had said.

Marie pointed to the painting. "Señor, you have enjoyed painting that?"

"You know I have," he said, puzzled by her anger and her purposeful manner.

"Sufficiently to repay you for your work?"

"It wasn't *work*—painting you would never be work!"

"I have a request to make, then, Señor—will you give it to me for mine?"

He looked at her for a moment, his face growing black. "You don't intend to let me paint you any more. You want to take it and yourself away from me?"

"No, Señor. I should not think of removing it from your studio. . . . I do not wish to remove myself, either—I have told you I have enjoyed being here."

"It is yours, of course; there's no one has a better right to it."

"I treat it, then, as mine." She went to the canvas and taking up the palette knife from the ledge of the easel, slashed it from top to bottom and the face of the Delilah up and down and across. Then flinging down the knife she faced Mendall's petrifaction, her eyes ablaze and her head held high.

He looked at her in silence, through the moments

in which the color ebbed from his face, leaving him ominously blue about the lips.

He came slowly toward her then. "You've—destroyed—the best thing I've ever—done," he said stiffly. *"How dare you!"*

He seized her by the arms with a grip that shook her. "How dare you ruin a beautiful thing!" he repeated through his teeth. "You jungle-cat!"

Marie met his rage with her yellow smile. "I am primitive enough to avenge an insult, Señor."

"I painted the truth of you!" he said brutally.

"Non—you did not. I am not, and I never have been that *thing!* You painted your prejudiced conception of me only. That has been our quarrel from the beginning. It was that brought me into your studio and kept me here. I wanted to fight your conception; kill it. Did you think for one moment that I should let that evidence of it live? . . . We have had our little struggle, Señor, and I have come out with only this small victory—you should be generous."

Mendall dropped her arms; he was returning to reason. He looked at the mutilated painting and then at her, and his face grew blank. "Victory!" he said. "You certainly have it. God knows you have taken possession of me!" He sat down and took his head in his hands. "Oh, lord! Why did you come at all!"

Marie stood looking at him. "I am sorry, Señor," she said, with her sudden drop to softness. "I warned you in the beginning how it might be."

"What does such a warning to a man amount to!"

"I treat it then as mine"

"You challenged me, and I took up the challenge. But you know that I have not tempted you, or played with you. You must have known what I was fighting for—a vindication of myself. The first time you looked into my eyes, the morning I sat ill and terrified at your table, you classed me with that Tehuana of yours, a creature a little nearer the animals than you think yourself to be. Then, when I showed you that I possessed the brain of a white woman, you conceived this idea of me you have painted. Do you think that did not hurt me? It hurt me and it made me angry. I have suffered much because of my yellow skin—my tiger's coat. As long as I live I expect to suffer because of it. I am accustomed to men—and women—who can see no deeper than my skin; who will not look beneath the tiger's coat to see what manner of woman it covers. . . . During these weeks I have shown you *myself*—without affectation or pretense. I even threw away the little conventions—it is not possible to be quite one's self when tied by them. And still you were determined not to advance further in your opinion of me than this ugly half-breed Delilah that I have just stabbed. . . . But, Señor, if you wish the exact truth: I think that she long ago became merely a bit of defiance, and that in your heart you feel I am not as she. So it is true what you say: that the victory is mine."

Mendall got up. "It is true," he said. "And it's true that I don't feel to you as I should to the woman in my painting. I love you as I love color—as I love

my work." He took her by the arms, looking into her eyes. "Let's have all the truth while we're about it. Marie, it hasn't been all defiance with you, any more than it has been with me. You've enjoyed being here with me. The artist in you answers to the artist in me—in these weeks haven't you learned to care a little? . . . I'm not asking for anything—you wouldn't give it to me anyway—but you're not afraid of the truth, you're too much mistress of yourself. . . . Tell me!"

She shook her head. "No. Not as you would have me care. I understand you, Señor. I am completely at home with you. I could work with you—but love—" She hesitated, then said clearly, "I love a man so dearly that every other man is far away from me."

"Some one—here?" Mendall asked blankly.

"Yes, Señor."

His brows lifted, a look of consternation. "But, Marie, with your—inheritance! . . . What can you expect?"

Her eyes glistened with sudden tears. "I do not know—what to expect. I do not know—I do not know at all—"

"So Margaret is right," Mendall said in a low voice. "It's a tragedy. . . . And that's the reason you have walked your floor like a wild thing! . . . Even though he loves you, MacAllister won't stand for a deceit."

Marie caught her breath and shrank.

"MacAllister is your father and he loves you, but he's not the man to practise deceit on another man. What hope is there for you?" Mendall persisted with the cruelty of the jealous.

Marie stiffened, her eyes fierce, in spite of the tears that hung on their lashes. "He has treated me like a father, but that does not make him my father," she said sharply. "He is not my father—far from it!"

"Why do you want to deny it; the truth is safe with me!" Mendall exclaimed. "Margaret has known from the beginning that MacAllister was your father—she knew your mother. She didn't tell me the whole story until the other night, but when she did it explained you."

Marie's eyes narrowed. "Have your various surmises turned your brain?" she demanded cuttingly. "Is your wife also insane? James Ogilvie, a cousin of Monsieur MacAllister, was my father. Monsieur MacAllister is no more my father—than you are!"

Mendall could not doubt the absolute certainty of her answer. "But he has a daughter—" he said, a little vaguely, for another certainty was gripping him.

"His wife and his child died years ago. I know that story better than your wife does. . . . And I know also, now, why your wife would no more touch me than she would that black woman who has slept opposite me all these weeks. . . . Some things are explained to me also, now. . . . But what does it all matter! It changes nothing." She ended wearily, her hands lifted to her aching temples.

"And it's MacAllister you love—of course—" Mendall said dully. "That will take you away from me completely."

Marie dropped her hands and looked at him, a steady look, a sufficient answer. Then, with the soft certain movement that Mendall loved, that neither oppression nor weariness could make ungraceful, she went out.

XLIV

AND WITH HER WENT INSPIRATION

MENDALL stood for a time where Marie had left him, looking at the door that shut her away. . . . She was having her day of trouble, but MacAllister's arms would close about her in the end; she was lost to him. . . . And with her went inspiration.

When he moved it was to look down at the mutilated painting, emblem of disaster, ruin, the end. He faced the dreaded blank: day in and day out of monotony made intolerable by the ache of nerves worn threadbare, sickness of spirit, barrenness, sterility; a domesticated teacher of little lines and curves to a coming and going herd of idiots, on and on, until he atrophied. . . . And he had it in him to create a golden thing like that torn bit of beauty on the floor!

He could not stand up under it. He went to the couch and lay with face pressed against his folded arms. . . . And, as he lay, there came reaction from dazed misery, the surge upon surge of longing to run from the future; to gather up his tools and go forth to starvation, perhaps; to a mighty struggle, certainly, but with the power to create undeadened by

intolerable shackles. He could paint in an attic, in a ditch, anywhere, if there was within him the sense of freedom.

Then, as always, there came to battle with craving the hot realization of necessity, of obligation. His hands gripped the couch, an actual holding himself down to the burning bed he had made for himself. He lay choking and panting, afraid to rise lest the mad longing to escape from it all should sweep him out and away. . . . Then, as if to make reminder more poignant, he heard the opening and closing of the front door, Margaret's short quick steps in the hall, and her dutiful descent to the labors that made up the sum of her day, the eternal, unchanging oiling of the wheels upon which their life ran, the kitchen, the supper table, the anxious scanning of the little bills upon the pantry shelf. . . . And presently she would open their bedroom windows to the hoped-for coolness of the evening, and fold back the sheet that would cover them when they lay so apparently one and in reality miles apart; her small reward for devotion.

The iron heel of necessity ground Mendall, and the bitter lash of irony scourged him, until he lay spent. The sharp ringing of the front door-bell did not stir him, nor Margaret's hurried ascent from the kitchen. It was MacAllister's incisive voice that brought him upright.

"Yes, I'm back—where is Marie?"

Margaret's answer was a murmur, but MacAllister's

reply came to him clearly enough: "Don't ye climb those stairs, Mrs. Mendall. Ye look as if the heat had done for ye. She'll hear me if I call," and his big voice with its note of urgency filled the house: "Marie!"

Mendall listened with breath held, the blood that pounded in him making even his eyes hot. But there was no answering movement in the room above.

"She's gone out, then," MacAllister said. "I have a guess where she'll be," and Mendall heard his stride on the porch.

He got up and went to the window. He was met by a blinding sunset. The massed clouds, shot through by gold and vermilion, were stretching threatening arms to the angry sun as it retreated to the horizon, its search-light rays streaming upon the hilltops, splashing and streaking them with rainbow hues. Twin Oaks Hill flamed with color, and with eyes fixed on it, striding toward it, was MacAllister. He dipped into the ravine and was lost to Mendall's hot gaze.

Mendall turned back into the stifling room. He staggered a little as he made for the door and the open. The dead air and the heat of passion and jealousy combined made him actually sick.

XLV

THE MEETING

MacALLISTER came up into the sunset with eyes searching the hillside, then fixed on a bit of gold which, as it slowly lifted against the sun's rays, shone like a nimbus around a pallid face. He knew that Marie saw him coming, for she stood up, her full height outlined against the sky. It was usual for her to wait for his approach in this fashion. It was part of the aloofness he had grown to expect, but he had been away and had returned without warning; he had decided that she would come to meet him. Instead, she was waiting, and with a face that was set and white. He came on hurriedly.

But when he was near enough for her to see his eyes, she did come, and with a suddenness that took his breath, with a swoop as light and as swift as a bird's, her hand held to her heart, as if it had stopped beating and then too suddenly flooded her with dusky color. She stopped short, a check on herself as it were, but she had come within reach of his hands, and when they settled on her and she met fully the light in his eyes, she grew ashen and swayed in a way that frightened him.

She let him take her in his arms. "What is it, Marie?" he asked huskily. "What is it, dear?"

She let him hold her, and MacAllister caught her prayer of gratitude, whispered in the tongue most natural to her. Her hand lifted to his burning cheek, as if she needed by actual touch to convince herself of his warmly breathing presence.

"What is it, dear?" he begged.

But, when he strained her to him, and tried to kiss her she drew herself away confusedly, and yet with decision. "You went—so suddenly—and I was frightened," she gasped.

It was the same avoidance of caresses, the holding herself apart, that had maddened him with uncertainty during the last weeks, and also the usual solicitude over him, only intensified, which had held him fast bound. He had not known how to cope with it; he did not know now just how to meet it. Her eyes were glistening, her lips quivering; there was gladness in her broken speech, the color of relief in her cheeks, and yet she held him off. He did not know what to make of her.

"Ye thought harm would come to me, did ye?" He laughed unsteadily. "What did ye think would harm me, now?"

"You went without a word to me—and I didn't know. But now you are here—quite here!"

"But I wrote ye! Didn't ye get it, then? . . . I wrote, and sent it out to ye at the dance!"

She looked her surprise. "But I didn't get it!"

Her gladness and relief were somewhat clearer to him now. "Why, I sent it by messenger—what went with it then, I'd like to know? . . . I was in an awful hurry, or I'd not have gone without seeing ye. They'd telegraphed me that the letters of Townley's we'd intercepted here had given them the clue they wanted; that they thought they had my man and they wanted my evidence. I had only a little time in which to plan Townley's arrest, and to do a hundred other things, but I wrote to ye, Marie, telling ye how it was —I'd never have gone without that."

Marie's face was suddenly wiped of expression. "And you arrested Townley?"

Though husky with emotion, MacAllister collected himself enough to speak steadily. "No. It was well planned, but he gave us the slip. He was expecting me to telephone him to come back down-town for me and bring me out to the dance, and that was what I did; he'd have walked into our trap then. But for some reason he took fright. The limousine helped him to get a train—so much we've discovered. They're on the still hunt for him now, but they've not got him so far. I doubt if they will—unless that man, Mortola, talks. But he's not likely to do that. He's a smooth devil. He persists in holding his tongue; he's probably paid to do it. It seems he was one of the cleverest strike inciters in England. Then he transferred his talents to this country. They've connected him with the strike at Beverly, and it's probable he was after the powder mills in Indiana. It's there we

got him, and it's there I've been. We can prove that he was in league with the Austrians here, but we want the men higher up—we want to know who and what *backed* such as Mortola. There are a lot of us in the same boat, and we want government help in the matter. And we're going to get it, only it will be slow going for a time. I want Kraup and a few of his kind on the witness-stand. He'd not relish a federal indictment, I'm thinking! . . . It was yer keenness helped forge a link in the chain, Marie. I'm proud of yer quick brain, and I'm grateful to ye." MacAllister spoke of the occurrences of the last few days with no elation, but when he mentioned Andrew Kraup his voice rose into harshness.

Marie had relaxed when he said Townley had escaped, but she wore no look of joy, even when he praised her. "I served you, so I am happy in that, no matter what comes," she said quietly. "You sent your letter out to me by a messenger thinking it would be safe, but I think that by some means Townley intercepted it. It told him enough, and he went."

"I wonder now if ye're not just right!" MacAllister exclaimed. "That was it, for a certainty!"

"I think so," Marie said in the same quiet way.

MacAllister drew an impatient breath. "Weel, let him go! I've been thinking these last few days—it's nasty business, this searching out criminals, and feeling suspicious of one's next-door neighbor, and looking askance even at one's own servants. I'm sick of it. And it always makes ye look frightened, talking

of all this violence. There's a deal of common sense in this idea that's interesting Bagsby and others: that there should be a group of international forces empowered by the nations to apply economic pressure in such fashion as to prevent war. War's just nothing but an outrageous waste—that's sure. . . . But come and sit down, Marie. Come up with me to the place that's been our parlor many an evening! I want to talk of other things."

He held out his hand to her with a commingling of pleading and determination and kept it outstretched until she reluctantly put her hand in his.

XLVI

"JUST LOVE"

THEY went up to the hollow between the twin trees. It dipped so sharply that it offered a couch-like seat, its rim a rest for Marie's head, and for MacAllister's arm. It was thickly matted with grass which the burning sun of the last few days had dried to hay, a resting place, clean, soft and sweet. The sun had dropped suddenly, its brow only visible above the horizon, but it still blazed defiance. Its level rays were so piercing that they turned their backs upon them and the massed clouds. The eastern sky glowed richly, almost to the zenith, free of threatening clouds. Below them were the wooded hills, their tops lighted by the departing sun, their bases merged in the shadowed ravines; and beyond that, undulating distances of yellowing harvest.

MacAllister looked off over it. "Eh, what a country!" he said. "I'm glad it nourished me—" and then he looked at Marie, a steadily purposeful look.

He was resting on his elbow, his hand buried in his shock of sandy hair; he could look down at her, but she must tip her head back to see his face. She sat with hands clasped about her knees, gazing into dis-

tance with that unwinking steadiness of hers. The anxiety of the last week had left its mark on her; her cheeks had thinned; there were shadows under her eyes, the hint of tragic resolve about her firmly pressed lips; she looked thirty rather than twenty.

MacAllister was in the grip of the accumulated emotion of the last six weeks and he meant now to have his say; the five days without her had driven him beyond the point where even her consummate skill could restrain him. But he paused for a moment. One may think much and swiftly in a few short moments, and as MacAllister looked at Marie he thought of many things. He went back in swift restrospect to the boy whose great urge was to acquire; to the well-remembered day when he first became conscious of the desire to marry and build a home as well as a fortune. He thought of the gay-spirited, inconsequential girl who had first aroused in him the passionate desire for a mate, for a home, for children; for man's natural and complete equipment. And he thought, as always, with sickening distinctness of the shock of discovery; of his fury at the deceit her weakness had made possible; of his despair, and the hard resolve that had exiled her and their child to a country that would look with leniency on their unfortunate inheritance. He thought of the years that had followed, when he had toiled for their maintenance and his own; of the shock of his wife's death, and the joyless arrangements for his child's future; and then of the commingled yearning and regret that had taken hold on him when his

child also had gone, the small creature whose coming had been an agony, and over whose future he had brooded with a feeling of actual sickness.

That commingling of yearning and regret had never left him. It was a bit of nature that had mastered him. He was no longer tied to a salaried position that gave him no scope; there was no one dependent on him; he was free to go; free to gamble with the small sum he had saved. He had returned to Laclasse, and out of his careful management had grown a fortune. And yet, throughout those fifteen years, he had been ridden by regret.

His bitter experience had made him averse to marriage, and at the same time tender to the fatherless. There were institutions in Nebraska that could have told curious tales of the large anonymous donations that came to them regularly. There was a Catholic home for abandoned children in Laclasse that under compulsion might have disclosed the fact that its chief donor was Alexander MacAllister.

Youth appealed to MacAllister. If in those strenuous years of erecting a fortune he had met a girl who aroused in him an unconquerable desire for possession that marriage alone would satisfy, the same overwhelming passion he had felt for the girl he had married, he would have married again. But he had not. As Bagsby had told Clare, there were infatuations that had resulted in unconventional relations—and the usual dénouement, a cessation of interest. Freda O'Rourke had aroused in him the most lasting interest

he had felt for any woman during his fifteen years of bachelorhood, and, undoubtedly, because, in a physical way, she had never overwhelmingly appealed to him, and because her adherence to her ideals and her capacity for unemotional friendship had won his profound respect. And she was a mature woman, only a little younger than himself. In theory, MacAllister would have maintained that a blameless intimacy such as theirs was not possible between a man and woman, but in practise it had proved quite possible. Her house had given him the comforts of home, and she herself had satisfied his need of intellectual companionship. She had braved the ill-opinion of Laclasse for the sake of their friendship, and that had called upon his loyalty.

Nevertheless he had grown restive under his way of life. He felt that he was living to no purpose. As Bagsby often told him, he was in his prime, he ought to marry. It was his restlessness that had urged him to build himself a beautiful home, and, though he would not confess it, with the desire for marriage urging him to it. With the contrariety of the man who really wants a mate, he was the more bitter in his flings against matrimony. He was dissatisfied with himself.

And so it had been with him when Marie came. She was the child of a cousin whose existence he had forgotten. He had known James Ogilvie in Mexico and had not liked him. He had met Ogilvie's French wife, and had seen Marie when she was a baby. Mac-

Allister knew that after his wife's death Ogilvie had sent his daughter to Belgium to school, more because he wanted to be free of responsibility than with any great interest in her welfare. Marie's coming to him for help was one of the unexpected things that only the world turmoil would have made possible. She had instantly captured his interest. She was fatherless, homeless and his own kinswoman. Though her Latin blood was apparent enough, she was curiously like her Scotch father. His features were easily traceable in hers. There had been a touch of the tiger in James Ogilvie. He was tawny, not sandy like the MacAllisters.

In the beginning his attitude to Marie had been somewhat comically paternal. He was too young for the part. He had studied her with tremendous interest, particularly her bewildering blossoming into beauty. The manner in which she had come into his arms on the morning of the explosion had banished forever his conception of her as an interesting child. She had thrilled him; captured him. For a time he had fought against it. He had lain awake because of it; walked the floor because of it; dreamed of it in his office, and cursed himself because of it. All his forty-four years of hard sense were opposed to it. He was more than twice her age; the thing was impossible.

Then under the stress of a passion he could not conquer he had flung aside his doubts and had made his desires apparent enough to Marie. He had laid siege to her, courted her determinedly, though for her own

sake he was careful of his conduct before others; he could not bear the thought that ugly comment might touch her.

And she had driven him to the point of despair. Since the morning of the explosion her manner had altered. With the skill that is at the command of even an inexperienced girl, she had forced him to wait, deluged him with uncertainty. Though quick to lend herself to the only course that MacAllister thought would make her introduction to Laclasse a possibility, she held herself aloof. She would permit no caresses; and when driven into a corner by his urgency showed such genuine distress that he was forced to desist.

When he had told her in what guise he meant to introduce her to Laclasse society, she had asked: "And you wish me to please your friends, Monsieur? To make myself quite charming?"

"Yes," he had replied. "This is to be yer home, and my people yer people. Ye know what it is I want, Marie. I want yer love; I want ye for my very own—"

But she had stopped him. "Monsieur, *don't*—" she had begged. "Please don't—I can not bear it!"

It was the first time he had urged her, and he was not to be silenced at once—not until, in utter distress, she had wrung her hands. "You beg me too much. I want to think—I want to think what is right, and you do not let me think. You have done everything for me—I do not know what to do!"

"If ye'll just tell me that it's not just gratitude and

affection ye feel for me, I'll wait yer time?" he promised.

But she had not reassured him. Instead, she began to weep, and so bitterly that he was frightened.

"I seem too old for ye—ye're doubtful of the past and of the future," he had said from the depths of his own distress. It was her youth that troubled him and at the same time called upon his consideration.

"To me you are all that is fine and dear—but, Monsieur, do not beg me so—please do not—"

He had not known what to make of her. But what was he to do?

He went on determinedly with his plans for her. If he chose at a future time to announce that he was going to marry his ward instead of adopting her, his way would be clear. He had presented her to Laclasse, and then had been consumed with jealousy over the attentions paid her by such men as Harmon Kent. He had shown Marie how he suffered, and in this respect she had been convincingly clear. Her opinion of the men she met was so scathingly accurate a visioning of their defects that MacAllister had been soothed. And even his jealous watchfulness could not discover that she favored one more than another. She was, as she explained to him, simply "charming Laclasse."

To him she was always utterly sweet; solicitous, eager to please, infinitely entertaining. And she had the poise of an experienced woman, except when he forgot restraint, and then he was met by a distress that verged on desperation. He was near to despera-

tion himself. He had settled into the belief that her youth was doubtful of that past of his; man's fund of experience of which a girl knows so little. Driven by a sort of desperate honesty, he had tried to confess himself, and she had stopped him.

She had winced and grown scarlet. "Don't, Monsieur! I understand—I understand far better than you think. And I understand you. You would never wish to hurt what you thought was good."

But MacAllister did not recover from his feeling of utter unworthiness, even when he told her of his blameless friendship for Freda. To this she had listened with an intensity of interest that paled her. "Freda is just pure gold!" he had concluded with no little feeling.

"And, Monsieur—this woman whom you feel so good and fine—she has been to you a true friend for six long years—" It was more a statement than a question. Marie's eyes had narrowed, her voice grown husky.

"She's the best friend I have," MacAllister had answered decidedly.

"And you say women have been unkind to her. . . . Monsieur, will you take me to see her—this friend of yours?"

MacAllister would have taken her to the ends of the earth if she had asked it; he was glad to take her to Freda; glad that, girl though she was, she shared his indignation at those who would not understand.

With man's usual density, he had explained Marie's almost breathless interest in that way.

He had taken her to see Freda and for the first few moments he had been puzzled by the intent, narrow-eyed way in which Marie had regarded Freda. But almost immediately she had slipped into sweetness. She had been charming to Freda, and Freda had been her usual self, gracious and well-poised and evidently deeply interested in this girl whom she knew he loved.

Just before he had been called away MacAllister had told Marie that for her sake he would not go on with the manufacture of ammunition; that he was turning over to other companies such contracts as were binding, and she had flushed into vivid joy: "Ah, Monsieur, whether for my sake or your own sake—I am glad you do not go on!"

But all these happenings had brought MacAllister no nearer to the thing he craved. During his five days of absence he had decided that, whatever the result, he must have a definite answer. And, now, as he looked down on Marie's white immobility, he felt that she also had reached some decision. He was terribly afraid of what it might be. But though tense with excitement, he was cool, the sort of coolness that had served him in financial crises.

He touched her hand. "Marie—?"

She shrank and gave him an upward glance, then looked away. It was what she saw in his face that hurried her into speech. "Monsieur, these days when

you have been gone, I have thought—that, now I have all my strength, I wish to do some work. At first I was quite contented just that you do everything for me, but I have changed my way of thinking—of many things. I am sorry for my old way of thinking—and of acting. I am sorry I have been of such expense . . . and I am sorry for these last weeks—that I have not told you—that I—" she stopped.

MacAllister's heart constricted. The pain he was enduring made him feel physically ill. It was her way of telling him that she did not love him, not in the way he wanted.

"What do ye want to do?" he asked tonelessly.

Marie kept her face turned from him. "There is only one thing I can do well—I can act. . . . It is to act for motion pictures, I mean," she continued steadily. "I can do that. I—was asked to do that once. I have the kind of face they wish; it has shadows, and my eyes and hair—are—remarkable—"

MacAllister caught the drop and break in her voice, the unconquerable stress of pain. He bent quickly to look at her averted face and saw the quiver of her bitten lips. He saw that her hands were gripped so tightly that the knuckles were blue, and it came to him, with a flash of relief that turned the world golden, that it was not just the pain she knew she was giving him that tortured her.

He took her twisting hands and drew them apart and turned her to him, trying to make her look at him. "Tell me first of all that ye don't love me—as I love

ye," he demanded. "Tell me that—before ye say any more!"

She was silent, her body unyielding and tense.

He put his arm about her, held her tightly, and with his free hand lifted her face so he could look into her eyes. They were dull, like the eyes of a sick animal. "Tell me, Marie?" he asked more gently. "Tell me, dear? . . . I know I'm twice yer age, but I have many good years before me, and I'd love ye dearly to the very last day of my life. I believe now that in yer heart ye love me—just as I love ye. Put away yer doubts, dear. Bide with me and be my wife, Marie?"

She relaxed suddenly into a trembling that shook her from head to foot. "I want to stay with you. I want to be your wife more than anything in the world. But I am not good enough to be your wife. I do not do right—often. These last days I have decided—it—the best thing is for me to go away. I would not make you happy. . . . Monsieur—I—" she stopped as if driven to utter desperation, too breathless even for tears.

"Ye've been thinking ye'd not make me happy!" MacAllister cried.

There was the ring almost of laughter in his voice, the note of triumph. He drew her down until she lay embraced, his arm beneath her head, and then he turned her face to his. "So it's yer beautiful gay-spirited youth has been troubling ye! Ye 'do not do right—often!' Ye'd not make me happy!" He kissed

her eyes and her cheeks and her throat passionately; kissed her until he heard her murmur, "I can not help it—" kissed her into submission. He lifted his head then and looked at her, lying still in his hold, at her eyes that had grown wide and shining. "Ye sweetest thing God ever gave a man—" he whispered. And then, "Do ye doubt still that ye'll make me happy?" he asked. "Tell me now what is in yer heart?"

"Just love," she said, and her arms drew him down again against her breast, against her hot cheek, and then her lips found his. . . . Not even the heavy growl of the clouds stirred those moments of still ecstasy.

When at last MacAllister raised his head, it was to a world wrapped in gloom and fire and driven rain. "Eh—" he said with the long-drawn breath that brought him back to reason. "It's fairly on us—I'd clean forgotten!"

He looked down at Marie, at her wide brilliant eyes that still saw only his face. "It's no use to run from it. Will ye be frightened, dear?"

"Frightened! With you!"

"Come away from the trees a bit, then, and ye shall have my coat. We'll just sit and watch it. It'll be no more than a warm shower-bath we'll be having together. I'll take ye back when danger from the lightning's over."

She laughed softly.

But when he had found a place for them and she sat in the circle of his arm while the rain deluged

them, she said with a quiver in her voice, "I came to you in a storm—do you remember?"

"Am I like to forget the thing that's brought me happiness! . . . But why do ye speak so sadly?"

"Perhaps because I am too happy."

MacAllister kissed her wet hair. "Maybe that's the way it is with a woman," he said tenderly. "I know I'm happier than in all my life."

And presently, when her warm nearness set him to thinking of the future, he asked, "Marie, will ye marry me very soon? . . . Before the first of August, Marie? . . . I'll take ye away then to some place that's cool."

Marie was silent so long that doubt touched him again. But when she spoke, it was clearly. "Yes. You would love me so much then that nothing could take me away from you."

"Do I have to kiss ye again to assure ye of that?" MacAllister asked.

When she lifted her face to his, it was not only the wet of the rain he kissed; but he did not know that.

XLVII

THE TRUTH LAY BETWEEN THEM

IT was late when Mendall came back through the grove to his house. The spongy ground was littered with leaves and twigs. The storm had long since growled away to the south, sweeping the sky free of clouds as it went, leaving behind a drenched world dimly lighted by a lopsided moon.

Mendall was conscious that he had walked steadily through the rain and wind, the lightning and the thunder until it was all over. Then he had circled about over the hills, brought back more by instinct than because of purpose. It had grown cool, and the stickiness of his wet clothes annoyed him.

The front door was ajar, and when he went into the hall he saw that the studio door was open and the room lighted. He came on in, blinking at the light.

The room was as he had left it, except that the torn painting stood against the easel, and near the couch, sitting in her usual low chair, was Margaret. Her face looked to him a white blot.

Hours of emotion had left Mendall with that curious feeling that he walked in an exaggerated space in which every object seems distant and small, and even

one's own body lacks substance. The sight of his wife, of the painting smoothed into a semblance of life, the customary atmosphere of his studio, did not shock him into a sense of reality. He was too utterly spent, and yet tense. His coat hung upon him, he was splashed to the knees with mud, chalk white, and his hair matted low on his forehead; he looked like a drug fiend after a long debauch—except that he was not shaking or unsteady on his feet.

He was conscious that Margaret rose, and that she spoke, though her voice seemed to come from a distance and curiously without modulation: "You are wet through—Carl."

And with ruin about him, his answer was as prosaic. "I was caught in the storm."

"You must put on dry things."

She went into their bedroom and brought him his dressing-gown and a towel, then left the room. Mendall looked at the painting and wondered in a vague way if she meant to remain away. He sat down on the couch and began to unlace his shoes. It was like her to attend to these little things. Even if there were a death in the house, she would be methodical; that was her nature.

When she returned it was to bring him a cup of tea and some sandwiches. He could not eat, but he drank the tea while she took away his wet clothes. . . . Objects lost their vagueness after that, the room its look of immensity.

She came back presently, and he noticed then how

deadly pale she was. She sat down again in her little chair, with hands clasped in her lap, and looked at him. Mendall knew what was coming; it looked at him out of her dark-circled eyes, but he did not brace himself against it, for he knew there could be only truth between them now. When her question came, it was quite evenly and steadily.

She pointed to the painting. "Carl, do you love Marie?"

"Yes," he said.

She shrank, and her voice rose a little. "You have deceived me then—right along—you two. You painted her secretly."

"I was mad to paint her—any artist would be. Would you have let me do it, if you had known?"

"No, I would not."

"I knew you wouldn't. That is why I did as I did."

"Marie loves you then?"

"No. She loves MacAllister. He is not her father; she told me so this afternoon. Her father and MacAllister were cousins."

Mrs. Mendall's eyes widened. "Will you, in justice to me, tell me how all this has come about, then? What is there between you and Marie? That is a bad woman you have painted."

Mendall tried to be succinct. "The cause of it all goes back beyond Marie—to my longing to be free from a life that ties my hands so I can't work. The thing I want most on earth is to paint. I've simply been *hungry and thirsty for freedom.* The three

women I've played with since we married made me forget a little that I was slowly atrophying—that was all. With Marie it's been different. . . . She *satisfies* me—I don't know how else to express it. . . . I don't think of her as I do of you; I don't respect her as I do you. I don't love her in the same way I love you. She's simply taken possession of me as—color does. Color thrills me—I can't help it. . . . I've never wanted to be unfaithful to you; I've never wanted to hurt you, and if I could lie to you now and have it hurt you less than telling you the truth, I'd lie—from start to finish. . . . It's just that you are a little like that school over there in Laclasse, a thing that's a deal more worthy than I ever thought of being: just steadiness, faithfulness, goodness. A mother as well as a wife. I've got only the instability of the wanderer in me. I don't deserve anything better than an inspiring mistress, with a face and body that can be used as a model. . . . But when I say that I don't mean that Marie has played any such part. She hasn't. I would tell you if she had. She has never allowed a single liberty. She has never shown me a sign of affection. She has always been loyal to MacAllister. Until this afternoon, when she came to destroy that painting because she said it slandered her, there's never been a word between us that you might not have heard. She told me this afternoon that she let me paint her partly because she saw I was starving for what she could easily give, but more because in the beginning I thought her a Delilah. She meant to

cure me of my opinion. I still think she could be just that—if she chose. I believe it's in her blood. But I don't think she is that, or has been. . . . You have the truth now, Margaret—all of it."

Mrs. Mendall had sat quite still through it, her eyes fixed on him, her face falling into lines that sharpened her features until they looked pinched and aged. When he had finished, she still sat carven and motionless. When she moved it was to bend forward a little, as if she wanted to see her husband more clearly.

She stretched an uncertain hand and touched his knee. "No—it's not all the truth—" she said slowly. "There's a reason why I must have it all. Carl—if you were free to go out—away from here—and just paint, and you had the choice of Marie or myself—for your companion—which of us would you *want* to take with you?"

He was dumb.

"You must tell me!" she said with sudden passion. "Don't deceive me at the very end!"

Mendall looked away from her, down at the floor. "I can't help being—as I am—" he said, his voice breaking.

She drew back and put her hand to her side, as if suddenly stabbed by pain. "What shall I do?" she said in a whisper. "It's not just of myself I have to think now." She got up and went a little aimlessly toward the open door of their room. "I must—think it out—" she said to herself.

Mendall jerked himself up and followed her. "Don't

go in there and shut yourself up to agonize over impossibilities!" he exclaimed passionately. "Let us put it aside and go on—as others do. I'll forget in time. I'll forget my painting. I'll give myself to teaching —I'll do anything you want me to—only, now the truth's out, for God's sake don't agonize over it!"

He reached her at their door, and she turned, her hand still held to her side, a small erect figure, with brows knit over clouded eyes. "I don't want to agonize. I said to myself while I waited here for you to come—I kept saying to myself—that I must be calm. I don't want to do anything that will hurt me, Carl. I want just to think—what is best. . . . You have the couch—I don't want you to come in. I want to be by myself to-night." There was infinite patience and self-restraint in her manner.

"I'll do whatever you want," Mendall repeated helplessly.

"Then let me be by myself."

She went in and closed the door softly.

XLVIII

THE BATTLE

MacALLISTER did no work on the morning after the storm. He went down to his office, looked over his mail and set certain tasks for his stenographer simply because he was waiting until he could ride out to Marie. He was eager for her; for more of her grave half-frightened happiness. He wanted to see her eyes by daylight; be assured again and again that she was all his.

He had not slept. He was as tense and as eager as he had ever been in his youth; a little bewildered as yet by the wonder of it all, and reverential of Marie's youth. He had spent the night in planning such a holiday as he had never had. Marie knew nothing of America; he would show her his country—from Canada to the Gulf; from the Pacific to the Atlantic. He would drop business for a year. They two would fare forth. . . . And back of it all was the old vision —his wife with their child in her arms. . . . When she tired of journeying, he would bring her back to Laclasse. His child must be a Nebraskan.

As he sat in his office, making a list of the many

things that must be attended to during the next three weeks, MacAllister's thoughts still circled about his vision. In three weeks' time they would be married; Marie had given him that promise.

MacAllister was alone with his thoughts, for he had sent his stenographer down to the bank, to Bagsby, with some business papers. He did not want to see Bagsby; he did not want to see any one while the first flush of happiness was on him. He would be endlessly questioned about Mortola's arrest; pestered with talk about the plant. On this day, of all others, he did not want such talk. When his stenographer came back, he would be off—before his office was invaded.

When the door of the outer room opened, MacAllister got up and took his hat. If he had not been so absorbed, he would have known before he came to the door of his room that the heavy step in the outer office was not that of his stenographer. It was Andrew Kraup who loomed on his threshold, keen-eyed and florid, his bulk exaggerated by the tan linen suit which was always his attire in hot weather.

MacAllister's brows lifted at sight of him. It was several years since Kraup had been in his office, or he in Kraup's. They were forced to transact business together occasionally; they saw each other frequently, and, even since the destruction of the plant, had succeeded in avoiding a clash. But a voluntary visit of this sort was a surprise.

MacAllister knew that the morning papers had a

full account of the Italian's arrest, and of his suspected part in the destruction of MacAllister's plant. Even the Laclasse papers had hinted that one or two men of prominence with strongly pro-German sympathies might be implicated. The German paper of the town had had a biased article on the occurrence and the other papers their expressions of antagonism —the usual controversy well tinctured with sensationalism. There were many who had looked askance at Andrew Kraup ever since the destruction of the plant. It had been made unpleasant for him at the Laclasse Club, and elsewhere.

MacAllister looked him up and down. "Are ye wanting something of me, Mr. Kraup?" he inquired dryly.

"If you haf a few moments to spare," Kraup answered deliberately.

"Not unless yer errand's important. I've an engagement."

"I haf no doubt it will be important to you," Kraup maintained coolly. "If I were in your place it would be important to me."

"I'm obliged to ye for seeking me, then, Mr. Kraup, and I'll be equally obliged if ye'll be brief." The thoroughgoing hatred each bore the other flared in their eyes, if not in their speech, smilingly in Kraup's eyes, hotly in MacAllister's.

MacAllister led the way back into his room, and motioned to a chair, but his visitor declined to be seated. They faced each other.

"Thank you, but it is not necessary. I haf come simply to deliver to you some papers which will interest you. I haf, as you know, connections in Europe. They haf sent me certain data which really belongs to you," and he took from his pocket a bulky envelope and laid it on the desk.

MacAllister glanced at the envelope, which was without direction of any kind, and then at Kraup, at the fighting light in his eyes which his coolness could not cover.

MacAllister frequently did unexpected things. He pointed to the envelope: "Take it, and go about yer business."

Kraup hesitated under the unexpected. Then he shrugged. "But those papers do not concern me—except as they will concern all Laclasse."

"I told ye to take them and be gone!" MacAllister repeated, his voice rising.

"And I decline to take them!" Kraup said, losing hold on his coolness. "You will do well to read them. If you wish to know what I gathered from them—I think you have had the material that makes a spy much closer to you than was that contemptible Italian whom you think did you. Better for you to learn from that packet, than from the daily papers, that you have been taken in by an adventuress."

MacAllister studied him for a moment, intently. Then, turning about, he went through the outer office and locked the door. Coming back, he locked the door to his room, and, with a stride, faced Kraup.

"Now explain yerself, ye spy and hatcher of plots! Because a woman's good brain has trapped ye, ye and yer tribe would be hatching a plot against her now, would ye!"

Andrew Kraup was quite as good a fighter as Alexander MacAllister. He did not quail an iota under MacAllister's fiery insult. "I am neither a spy nor a hatcher of plots, Mr. MacAllister! I am just so good and loyal an American citizen as yourself. . . . I said you had been taken in by an adventuress, and I repeat it! A woman who has no right to the name she goes by!"

"Give a name to yer lie!" MacAllister said, dead white.

"Marie Ogilvie—so called—"

MacAllister was on him with a leap. Kraup was on his guard, but his upflung arm only deflected MacAllister's blow from his jaw to his cheek. MacAllister's fist laid bare his cheek-bone, and, in spite of his bulk, sent him reeling.

He came back at MacAllister like any fighting mastiff, and grappled with him. They swayed and twisted, Kraup's bulk opposed to MacAllister's hard muscle, his thick fingers gripping MacAllister's taut throat, MacAllister's iron hand closing in the fat beneath Kraup's chin.

Kraup had been quite as powerful a man as MacAllister, but the accumulated flesh of middle age hampered him. The advantage was with MacAllister. He bore his adversary back, smothered him into semi-

consciousness, and, with a final twist, brought his body to the floor with a thud that shook the desk. . . . He stood over him then, panting and purple, his hands still clenched, watching Kraup breathe his way back to consciousness.

"Have—ye—had—enough—?" he demanded when he knew that Kraup could hear.

The motion Kraup made seemed to satisfy him. He knelt down beside him. "Since ye are what ye are, ye'll just take the treatment that's given yer kind," he said, and rapidly searched Kraup's pockets. From an inner breast pocket he drew several letters which he took to the desk and examined.

But, first, MacAllister went to the alcove and soaked a towel which he wrapped about his own aching throat. He dipped another in the basin and flung it down beside Kraup, who was struggling to sit up. "Bring yerself to," he said roughly. "Ye fought well—I'll say that for ye." And going back to the desk he began to examine the letters. Two of them were in German; he could not read them. The other two were evidently part of a correspondence with German relief societies.

Meantime, Kraup had risen and gone shakily to the set-basin. He bathed his face and hands and his throat, deliberately making himself as presentable as possible and, at the same time, collecting his strength. He turned then, and though he looked ghastly, chalk white, marked with purple, and blood-stained about the collar, there was a purposeful air about him.

MacAllister had finished his examination of the letters. He had also unlocked the doors of the two rooms, and had come back to the desk, where he stood waiting, his fist on the letters. "I've looked at these," he said, when Kraup turned. "The two I can read ye may take with ye, but these in German, I'll keep. If they're of no interest, they'll be returned to ye, safe enough."

"Keep them—all—" Kraup said. "You will see that they all haf—to do with money sent to my people —who are in need." . . . He spoke with pauses, and with great difficulty, nevertheless forcibly. "Mr. MacAllister—I haf a word to say to you: I do not blame you that you haf beaten me because of a woman whom apparently you lof sufficiently to fight for. That is natural. . . . But there is one respect in which you do me an injustice. I—and other respectable citizens of America—like myself—thousands of us—haf been assured that we were an honor to this country. We *are* an honor to this country—we haf helped to build it up. It is *our* country—just as it is yours. . . . Then there comes this war—which is not of our making, far from it, Mr. MacAllister—and we haf our sympathies for our people and for the country from which we came. That is quite natural. I myself haf an aged mother in Germany, whose two sons, my brothers, haf been killed in this strife. I haf many other relations—all of whom are in trouble. My business suffers also. So it is with many like me. . . . Then what do you in this country do? There never

was a war in which there haf not been spies and criminal dealing and much talk and much sensation. You lump us all together. Your suspicions are for us all —good citizens and bad. It is enough to make a man bitter! There are thousands, like myself, who do not believe in butchery; who would no more countenance espionage and lawlessness—who would no more haf to do with the destruction of property—like your plant —not a bit more than you, Mr. MacAllister. I haf always fought you openly, Mr. MacAllister—as you haf fought me. I fought the building of your plant openly, but I had no part whatever in its destruction!"

Though husky, to the point of whispering, Kraup had gathered force as he went on, and now he was flushed to purple, a somewhat lurid spectacle with the blood trickling down his cheek from his wound. He brought his fist down on the desk. "Mr. MacAllister, I speak my word for the average, good German-American citizen! He is just so good and loyal an American citizen as you are! This is his *home.* His children are *Americans,* and their children after them will be *Americans!* . . . I am no *'spy,'* Mr. MacAllister, and *I did—not destroy—your plant—"* He stopped from sheer inability to continue, choked into gasping breath by the increased swelling of his throat. He drew out his handkerchief and held it to his bleeding cheek.

MacAllister had watched him throughout from beneath lowered brows. Though still as implacably angry over the real cause of their battle, it was in him

to discriminate, to grant that, concerning the destruction of his plant, Kraup had spoken the truth. Many times in his business career MacAllister had taken a man's word as his only guarantee, when there had been this same ring of sincerity as assurance, and his confidence had not been misplaced. There was sincerity in every word this man had spoken. And, for the first time, MacAllister saw Kraup's position and the position of others like him from their standpoint.

"I believe ye," he said curtly. "I'll grant ye had no part in the blowing up of my plant, and, if I'd thought as I do now, I'd not have gone through yer pockets. Ye may take yer letters—I've no interest in them. . . . But *this*," and MacAllister transferred his fist to the envelope Kraup had brought him, "on this score, I'll fight ye to the ends of the earth—and beyond!"

Kraup had recovered enough voice to speak. "You may. If you find that I haf brought you falsehoods, I am ready to stand for the consequences. *I* haf belief in those documents. . . . I brought them to you for two reasons, Mr. MacAllister: one, because I was not averse to hitting you on a soft spot; another, because I determined that you should not drag my good name into any proceedings connected with the destruction of your plant." There was the ring of sincerity in this statement also.

MacAllister came close to him, his face white again with anger, and his eyes ablaze. "And I know it's a lie of some sort ye've brought me, though ye may not think it. And I warn ye! If ye so much as part yer

lips in disparagement of my kinswoman, *I'll kill ye!* . . . I'm a man of my word, as ye know, Andrew Kraup."

Kraup looked him steadily in the eye. "Yes—and I think as I did when I came in here—that it will be silence for silence, Mr. MacAllister." And turning about, he went out through the outer office.

MacAllister stood for a moment with hands clenched. Then, with a passionate gesture, he thrust aside the letters Kraup had left behind him, and taking up the blank envelope, tore it open. It contained another envelope which bore a superscription that dyed him scarlet. He was so aflame with rage that the several typewritten sheets which he unfolded, a copy evidently of a lengthy communication annotated with foreign exactness, shook in his hands. There were also several photographs, and clippings from Paris papers.

MacAllister read the entire contents of the inner envelope, then sat staring at its superscription:

CONCERNING
MARIA DE LA GUARDA
ALIAS
MARIE OGILVIE

XLIX

A SILENT HOUSE

IT was nearly noon when MacAllister stood before the Mendalls' door.

He did not notice Mrs. Mendall's pallor and heavy eyes when she opened to him; or, rather, her look was so a part of his own tense consciousness of tragedy that it made no impression on him. "Will ye tell Marie I want to see her?" he said, and passed on into the bare little room which had received him the first time he had crossed the Mendalls' threshold. As he stood waiting, he remembered in a hot aching way the errand that had brought him on that first day.

And his bent brows and hard-set face made as little impression on Mrs. Mendall. She had crept about a silent house that morning. Her husband was up, but his studio door had not opened, and Marie had kept her room, as had been usual of late.

Mrs. Mendall was too despairingly anxious even for jealousy to have its way with her. The travail of the night had brought forth no decision, except that they must, as Mendall had said, put the thing aside and go on; it was more necessary than ever that they go pa-

tiently on together. Marie would go; MacAllister would take her, and they must go on as long as Mendall could endure. The urge to paint was as much a part of him as the breath he drew. His search for inspiration would continue; the break for freedom would come sooner or later; therein lay her despair. But, meantime, they must go on together.

Mrs. Mendall went up and delivered MacAllister's message through Marie's closed door, and came down again, hastily. Marie's soft answer, quickened by the lilt of happiness, aroused in her so sudden a fury that she ran from herself—down to her room. She could have throttled the girl with her bare hands.

She walked the floor with hand pressed to her side, as she had the night before, when she had told her husband that she wished to do nothing that would hurt herself.

"You must be calm! You *must* be calm!" she whispered.

When she heard Marie come down and go into the room opposite, Mrs. Mendall walked faster—until raised voices, MacAllister's and Marie's, came distinctly to her.

Then she opened her door and listened. Mendall also had come out into the hall. They both heard, for the door into the reception room was open and Marie's rapid steady speech cut into the silence of the house. It could have been heard even behind closed doors.

L

THE YELLOW STREAK

MARIE had come down to MacAllister with the signs of a night of emotion upon her, cheeks pale, eyes shining, lips vivid and faintly smiling. She came into the little reception room—and stopped dead, for MacAllister stood beside the table with brows bent on her, gray, except for the purple marks about his chin and throat, grim-lipped, fiery-eyed, terrible. The old sickening rage at deceit had its grip on him.

Marie had halted on the forward step, and her sudden shrinking was like the withdrawal from a blow. If MacAllister had needed confirmation he had it in the instant mask-like rigidity of her face.

"So it's true, then?" MacAllister said.

"What is true?" Marie asked mechanically.

"That ye've deceived me from the first moment I saw ye."

There was a silence, and then Marie said stiffly, "Yes."

"And why should ye come, passing yerself off to me as my kin; smiling in my face and taking my love? Bringing on me all over again what I've been through once before? If ye were after my money, ye took a

fool way to reach it. Didn't ye know ye'd surely be discovered?"

She answered only his first accusation. "I am your kinswoman. It all grew out of that."

"And ye expect me to believe that!" MacAllister said cuttingly. "Will ye tell me also that ye're not the daughter of Dolores de la Guarda, who was mistress to Francois Vallé, the painter? That ye were not educated by him? That ye were not a dancer in public places in Paris when the war broke? That ye did not lie to me when ye told me ye went to Mexico in search of James Ogilvie, who ye made out to me was yer father? By what chance ye gained possession of the letters ye showed me, I can't guess, but it's sure ye came by them by no fair means. If ye'll lie, ye'll steal—" MacAllister paused in an attempt to control himself, for his next accusation cut to the quick of a prejudice that lay in the very marrow of him. "Ye're not a white woman, Maria de la Guarda; ye're part Indian. How dared ye put yerself off on me as my kin?"

"All they have told you is true," Marie said haggardly, "but that I am not your kinswoman—that is not true."

"With that blood in ye! Never! . . . I thought, with every inch of the way I traveled out here to ye, that with that blood in ye 'twould be no more than nature for ye to have been just such as yer mother—just—"

Marie flared into sudden life. She came so close

to him that he looked down into blazing eyes. "You shall not say that to me!" she said wildly. "You shall *not!* I have never been *that!* And in all they have told you, they have not said that! . . . You may say to me that I lie—or that I have stolen—or that I am not white. You may throw me out because I have deceived you in other ways; because in the beginning I meant to use you. You may believe all the wrong things I have done that are true, but you shall not believe that thing which is not true!" The tears welled suddenly in her eyes, the taut muscles in her face beginning to quiver. "There are two things you must believe: one, that I love you—utterly; and the other, that I have never in any way at all belonged to any other man than you—only you."

MacAllister looked away from her tears, his face hard set.

But her sudden passion had tapped the fountain of speech. She brushed away her tears and went on rapidly: "I know how they have told you the few facts they have discovered. They have told them coldly and without explanation. But I will tell you the other things which are quite as true. . . . It is true that I am partly Indian. My grandmother was a Tehuana of pure blood. She was the mistress of Gonzalo de la Guarda, a Spaniard of importance in the Isthmus. She kept his house; that is frequent in the Isthmus. He was pure Spanish; he came from Spain; there is still the de la Guarda family in Aragon. He was manager of plantations in the Isthmus.

"My mother was their daughter. She was beautiful, a golden woman; the half-breed Tehuana is frequently beautiful. And she was not ignorant. Her father had cared enough to educate her. But, when the planter goes back to his people and forgets, there are only two possibilities for such as my mother: she must go into the hut of some Indian, or become what my mother was—the woman of your cousin, James Ogilvie. The Tehuana feels herself fortunate to have escaped the hut of the Indian. There is no sin in it, to her mind, so long as she is faithful. And my mother was beautiful; she had charm. She kept her place for seven years. I am not eighteen, Monsieur. I am twenty-three. How often I have longed to tell you so when you have thought me too young!"

Marie drew a quick breath and went on. "You know that in the beginning your cousin was manager over a plantation in the Isthmus, and that he went to Paris afterward. He took my mother and me with him. . . . It was then the usual thing; he wished to marry —a Frenchwoman." Her voice rose a little. "He left my mother, Monsieur! And me! He took his bride to Mexico and left us! . . . He left my mother with very little, Monsieur, and with me, a little child depending on her. She had met Francois Vallé. He loved her, and she became his. I do not censure my mother. She was the result of her inheritance and her rearing. I know that she was true to your cousin as any good wife, and that she also was faithful to Francois Vallé.

"He was a strange brilliant man. He was purely the artist. He was very kind to my mother. He sent me to a convent school, and until I was sixteen I was with the good nuns. Afterward I was with my mother and Francois Vallé. He traveled with us; into Spain, into Italy, all over Europe. But always he wished not to make friends with people. We knew few people. We lived mostly in Rome. He died in Rome, both he and my mother, within a year.

"Then I was quite alone, and without anything. But I had been taught to dance; I had talent for it. I came to Paris. I danced first in a chorus, then for a few months at café chantants. They called me, 'La de la Guarda.' . . . I learned much in those three years, Monsieur. They were hard years. I had to fight continually to keep my self-respect. I became bitter, and suspicious of all who approached me. I need not have lived alone and remained just a poorly paid dancer. A little 'protection' would have given me my chance. But back from the time when I knelt with the nuns, I had said, 'I will never be as my mother,' and through the years I had said the same thing. The hatred of it was in every atom of me.

"Then there came an opportunity. A motion picture company employed me. They sent me to Belgium, to their company of players. Germany had declared war, but who thought it would become so terrible? Our band of players scattered to seek shelter where they could.

"You know what followed. I marched with penniless people who fled from their homes. We were hungry and terrified. We came into Antwerp. But there was nothing I could do there to earn my bread. I was starving. I decided I would go to Mexico—to my father. He *must* give me help. I begged a relief society to send me. There was a boat to Vera Cruz, and in their great kindness I was given a place in its steerage.

"*Mon Dieu,* that voyage! Some I have told you, and some I have not. There were refugees who had waited for weeks for that boat. We were herded in as one would not herd cattle, and among my bedfellows was a fair-haired girl with eyes yellow like mine. We asked each other our names, and she said, 'I am Marie Ogilvie, and I go to my father, James Ogilvie.'

"And I said, 'I am Maria de la Guarda, and I go to those who I hope will help me.' I thought I would not tell her till I had made her love me, but I felt a great gladness. She was gentle and good; she would love me.

"She could not tell much, or question at all, for she was dazed still with anxiety, and ill. But so much she told me: Her mother had died many years before, and since a little girl she had been kept at convent schools in Belgium by her father. Hers was the story of the refugee: she had fled with others; she had written to her father and received no answer; she had

no money but what hung in a little bag about her neck; she had been shipped as soon as there was a boat to take her.

"She was not strong. She was fearfully ill from the sea, and helpless. I was stronger; I could help her. I waited on her, and she clung to me. It was fearful all the way; when we reached Vera Cruz she could scarcely walk.

"We had only come from one war to another. Vera Cruz was full of refugees from the North. All was confusion in that place of heat. No one asked from where you came. But she must have some place to stay till I could send to her father. I found a room, a poor place.

"I went then to the office of a mining company where she told me her father would be known. They looked strangely at me when I asked how James Ogilvie could be reached. 'The mines are in the hands of the rebels,' they told me. And then, 'James Ogilvie is dead—he was shot in a skirmish two months ago.'

"I went out without a word, for I felt as ill as if I would die. I went back to her, but so soon as I saw her, I knew I must not tell her; it would kill her; she had grown so very ill. The fever was already upon her. I brought then a doctor, and he said, 'It is typhus. You will have it too.'

"I told her then who I was, but she could not understand; she was in unconsciousness most of the time. I took her little bag of money and hung it about my neck, and her few little things I tied up closely with mine. I was afraid they would steal from us.

"They took us to a hut apart from people, and it was only a few days with her. The fever was on me when she died. They said I raved wildly. That I said, over and over again, 'I am James Ogilvie's daughter; I am James Ogilvie's daughter,' and again and again, 'Bury Maria de la Guarda deep.' When I came back to my senses they told me, 'Maria de la Guarda is dead.'

"Monsieur, it was then I lied for the first time. I lied by saying nothing. I lay and thought, and it came to me then that I *would* be Marie Ogilvie! If I did not explain, no one would know. Marie Ogilvie had not been in Mexico since a child. And after the flames had swept Europe, who would remember either Marie Ogilvie or Maria de la Guarda? She was my sister; I would take her little money and go away quickly to America and make a new life. I would be legitimate, all white. No one would guess I was anything else.

"As soon as they would let me go, I came by boat to New York. Some poor French people on the boat told me of a French hotel by the wharves. It took nearly all my money. I was ill; I could not find work; I was in despair.

"It was not till then I planned to come to you. I discovered about you from one of my father's letters to my sister, which I had put with my things. It was the letter I presented to you. In it he said: 'If anything should happen to me, go to Alexander MacAllister,' and he told how to reach you. It came to me as a great inspiration. I would make myself as young as possible, and come to you. And, Monsieur,

there was in me the bitter feeling that your family owed me something. It made it seem less wrong to deceive. I took a certain satisfaction in deceiving.

"I stole away from the hotel before daylight, for I owed for my room. If I paid, I had not enough money to come to you. There was a starved cat, a yellow thing, came to me in the night, while I waited to come to you. I shall never forget her. She was like me, starving and without a friend. I dared not touch her or I should weep aloud. . . . I did actually starve in that journey. I had hardly a penny left after my ticket. I walked to you through Laclasse, through the rain. When I reached your door I had not one penny. I was quite desperate. I was fighting for my life." Marie had grown hoarse from steady speaking, but her voice was touched again by passion when she asked: "Do you think for one moment, Monsieur, that I would have endured to that point if it were possible for me to be—as my mother? Ah, no!"

Then she dropped on the instant to a softness that was tender and pleading. "You were really like a father to me, Monsieur, and for a little time I took advantage, for I was still bitter. I thought: 'I will gain all I can.' But very soon I was ashamed and so grateful that I could not be bitter. Then I thought: 'As soon as I am well, I will go away, and from a distance I will tell him who I really am.' . . . But soon, very soon, I forgot it all in loving you—as a woman loves a man—utterly. And I knew that you loved me—as a man loves a woman.

"It's asking the impossible of me"

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"Then I was in misery. One day I would say, 'I will tell him,' and the next, no power could have forced me to tell. If I told you you would not love me. I was both happy and in agony. I feared terribly that some one would discover and tell you. I was afraid of the German spies I was certain were about you. If I angered them they might search out the truth. But I loved you so much that I warned you of danger. And they have revenged themselves—just as I feared. When Townley fled, he left for me at the dance the words, 'La de la Guarda.' They knew. . . . While you were away I was in agony. I thought they had told you. When you came back to me, up the hillside, it was like hell turned into heaven. . . . I nearly told you last night. I brought my courage far enough to ask to be sent away. . . . But then you kissed me. . . . I would have told you before I married you . . . my love would have made me—just as it made me warn you of danger—"

There was a long silence. MacAllister had turned his averted face and looked at her as she had gone on. He looked down when she had finished. His face had not changed—it was still set and hard.

Finally she asked, scarcely above a whisper, "Monsieur—you do believe now that I have told the truth—do you not?"

"Yes," he replied, "I believe ye have told the truth—at last."

"And you—love me a little—still—"

His brows came together heavily. "I don't know

ye," he said. "Ye're a woman I don't know. Ye're not the girl I've loved."

Marie looked at him through another long silence, the color of hope ebbing from even her lips. But the courage of desperation was in her. She knelt down and taking the hand that hung at his side put her cheek against it; and then her lips. "But I am that girl, Monsieur. I would always be that girl to you. Just always—love; nothing but love. . . . Monsieur, the Indian blood in me—which you hate—it is not *bad.* Truly it is not. It gives me *faithfulness.* Only just that—"

"God!" MacAllister said, through his teeth. "Ye hurt me! But I'll have to tell ye. . . . Stand up, Marie. . . . It's just what I said. Ye're not the girl I loved. Ye're a woman with whom I'm not acquainted. It's asking the impossible of me. It's a *stranger* ye're asking me to love."

Marie stood with the look of death on her.

With an effort, MacAllister went on. "I want to do for ye—just as I did the first night ye came. Ye are my kin. . . . Ye must stay here with the Mendalls till I know what to do. But—"

She waited—or, rather, she seemed too lifeless to question.

MacAllister made another effort. "But—my love's —just dead, Marie."

She stood a moment, staring vaguely. Then she turned about, stopped aimlessly—and then went on, out of the room.

LI

"I'LL SEND FOR HER THEN"

MacALLISTER watched Marie go and made no motion to stop her. He looked at the door through which she had passed until the sound of her slow ascent of the stairs had ceased. Then his eyes shifted to the floor. He stood motionless for a time, thinking.

It was a movement in the hall that finally stirred him, a heavier footstep on the stairs than Marie's. He went to the door. Mrs. Mendall stood in her doorway, and, going up the stairs, was Mendall.

"Will ye come in here for a minute—both of ye?" MacAllister said. "I have something to say to ye."

They came in and looked at one another, three faces tense with emotion, MacAllister's hard-set, Mrs. Mendall's absolutely colorless; Mendall's crimson and with eyes ablaze. Evidently they had overheard what had passed.

"So ye know?" MacAllister said.

It was Mrs. Mendall who spoke. "Yes."

"I'm saved an explanation then. . . . We were to be married in three weeks. . . . That's ended, but

I want time to think what's best for—Marie. Will ye keep her a little—till I can make arrangements?"

"I am afraid that will not be possible," Mrs. Mendall answered. "It will be best for her, better for all of us, if you take her with you now."

MacAllister winced, both because of the affront to Marie and the hurt the thought of seeing Marie again gave him. "I can't do that. It's beyond me. . . . I know ye have been put to trouble, but I mean ye shall be fully remunerated. Ye gave her a home, and that's no small thing to do. I thank ye for that, and I apologize to ye both for the deceit that's been practised. Nevertheless, Marie is my kinswoman. I mean she shall have every consideration. Since ye feel as ye do, Mrs. Mendall, I'll ask only that she stay the day —until I go into town and find a place for her. . . . I'll send for her then—this evening."

Mrs. Mendall was silent. It was Mendall who spoke. "Marie may have a home in my house as long as she needs it," he said clearly.

MacAllister could not have told why Mendall's speech angered him. It was more the look of the man. There was an air of defiance about him; or excitement. His eyes were blazing. Was it just that he resented his wife's hardness?

"Thank ye," MacAllister returned stiffly, "but I'll not trouble ye longer than a few hours." He turned to Mrs. Mendall. "Will ye kindly tell Marie to be ready by this evening? That I'll be sending for her?"

He went out to his machine and handled it roughly,

jamming it into high speed even before he had cleared the grove. He had been angry for hours. And it was anger more than anything else that held him now, the same stubborn rage and hurt and hard resolve that had banished his wife. But, from experience, he knew that when anger died a little, he would suffer horribly; a worse torment than mourning over the dead, for one thinks of the dead as at peace. But he would be carrying about with him Marie's suffering as well as his own. . . . He must never see her again; both for her sake and his own. It was like death, without its finality. The same well-remembered misery.

LII

AN ADVANCED WOMAN

MacALLISTER raced with his thoughts, against the summer wind, going by the shortest way to Freda O'Rourke's door. For six years he had carried most of his difficulties to her.

He called her into her living-room and told her Marie's story, from start to finish, standing before her with the same grim face he had shown Marie; when restlessness seized him, walking the floor while he talked. And Freda listened in silence, without question or comment, until he had finished; just as years before, she had listened to the story of his early tragedy. That had been during the uncertain period when she was deeply indebted to him and he was still hotly sore over his marital experience and determinedly averse to marriage; when each was testing the character of the other. She had listened to him then, thoughtfully and not emotionally. It was her understanding of him and her accurate appraisement of the consequences to them both that had steered him clear of the shoals and quicksands, the complications into which he had floundered with others—into a genuine friendship.

Possibly MacAllister was right when he had said that Freda was "a bit of a superwoman." It is more probable that she was simply possessed of a strong will, of great self-control, and an exceedingly clear understanding. That she was imbued with the modern woman's determination to discriminate between mere sex attraction and love. That she had evolved a philosophy which satisfied herself, concerning the relations of men and women. That she had decided upon what should be the basis for the relation which has to do with peopling the world; that she was a worshiper of the new-old idea that marriage should be a combination of the best elements of both friendship and sex attraction, and that that combination and no other should be given the name of *love*. And, also, that friendship unalloyed by the usual sex complications was quite possible between men and women. In short, that Freda O'Rourke was an "advanced" woman, though not of the "free-love" or "sympathy-craving" order—which is, in reality, a reversion to the hyper-civilization of the Roman era and has no rightful place in the hard sense of the modern scheme.

At any rate, Freda had lived up to her beliefs. She had defied the universal assumption that an intimacy between a man and a woman can have but one significance, and had suffered as a result. She had handled MacAllister wisely, and had won his lasting friendship, and had persisted in holding what she had won even when Laclasse had shown its disapproval so plainly that MacAllister had become aware of it.

But, though enraged over the slights shown her, he had not asked her to marry him; he had never asked her to marry him, and Freda knew why. He had discovered early that she would demand honesty of him; he knew that she would take only a whole loaf, and he had but half a loaf to offer her; in the latter years, a devoted friendship, even affection, but not the perfect combination she demanded.

However much she had suffered in secret, Freda had clung to their friendship. What she would be giving MacAllister in return for real love was a secret Freda had always guarded. If, like all women, she had dreamed sometimes that MacAllister might awake to the perfect thing and offer it to her, it was a dream carefully concealed. Latterly, a dream she had willed herself not to dream; what she had was better than the thing most wives had, to her way of thinking, better even than the thing MacAllister was offering Marie, which Freda's clear-sightedness had discovered was principally an overwhelming passion which was capable of as overwhelming a revulsion. It was the same craving that had married MacAllister to the primitive girl whose weakness had entangled them both in tragedy. Had his feeling for Eugenie been love, as Freda conceived of love, he would have found a way out of their difficulty less cruel to them both than exile. And, vice versa, had Eugenie's love been real love, she would not have married him; the entire tragedy would have been averted.

But Freda had judged Marie to be a very dif-

ferent girl from Eugenie. She had sounded Marie, as she did most people in whom she was interested. Marie was not easy to fathom, but Freda was convinced, even after hearing of Marie's deceit, that the girl had character; that she had it in her to give MacAllister a very perfect love. It was merely the primitive in her that had succumbed.

But, at the same time, Freda took a much more lenient view of Marie's inheritance than MacAllister did. Being something of an eugenist, as well as an analyst, Freda thought, as she watched MacAllister's angry pacing, that Marie's mixture of Latin effervescence and Indian immobility combined with MacAllister's hard Scotch qualities would make a child of no mean type. And both Marie and he had rare physical perfection, health and strength in abundance. She thought of it with a constriction of the heart, because she herself had given the best six years of her life to friendship instead of to motherhood, the portion that might have been hers, for she had not been without suitors, men who had not appealed to her particularly, not as MacAllister did.

Freda set the hurt aside, and as MacAllister talked of the present, she thought of the future. She realized that what MacAllister considered the end was only the beginning. Time, and time only, would show how much real love there was beneath all his hurt and anger and revulsion of feeling. He had been shocked back into habit. He was laboring under the conviction that this was an outrage parallel to the one his wife

had practised on him, and his revulsion of feeling would have to have its way with him. He had thought himself profoundly in love with a young untried girl, the combination of passion and reverence a man of MacAllister's type bestows on a girl, and suddenly she stood before him a faulty woman he did not know. Freda understood perfectly his repeated assertion that this Marie was a "stranger" to him. And she realized, as neither he nor Marie could realize, how much the future depended on Marie. It was even possible that, after Marie had passed through the agony of being thrust aside by MacAllister's anger, Marie herself might undergo a revulsion of feeling; that depended on the sort of love the girl really felt for him.

And Freda guessed what it was MacAllister meant to ask of her long before he reached his request. "I've talked with Mrs. Mendall since all this, and she'll not keep Marie," MacAllister concluded. "She'll not keep her longer than till this evening. I'm not blaming her for feeling as she does, but I don't know what to do. Marie's suffering; I can't bear she should suffer among strangers. . . . Would ye take her, Freda—for just a little?"

There were many things Freda would rather have done than this. It would be an almost insupportable test of the thing that lay between herself and MacAllister, and which she longed to keep intact. Until Marie had appeared, she had had the best there was in MacAllister untouched by the influence of any other woman. Marie had the primitive qualities that no

woman loves, no matter whether she is herself possessed of them or not. It had been a little hard to stand by and see MacAllister yield himself up to Marie's allure. If she took the girl into her house, it meant that she would champion Marie's cause. She would not take her otherwise. . . . But what was her love for MacAllister worth if it could not stand even such a test? It was her honest conviction that Marie would make him a good wife.

"Of course I will take her," she said.

"Ye're fine, Freda!" MacAllister returned with feeling. "I'd go through fire to serve ye, ye know that!" Then, because he was in the state when a man speaks out his thoughts without first having smoothed them, he said with real regret and genuine wonderment: "I wish it had come to love between us two, Freda. I've been awful near to loving ye, all these years. Tell me why, instead of friendship, we've not had for each other the fever of the blood I've had for the two who are by no means yer equal?" He put his big hands on her shoulders, a favorite act of his when moved. "Tell me, ye who are so wise?"

Though she smiled whimsically, Freda flushed. "Perhaps because I am 'wise' . . . but more, I think, because you obey pretty literally the great law of opposites. Because your sex instinct craves the primitive."

"Eh, no!" MacAllister said sharply. "I hate it!"

"That's merely your education in prejudice. You don't want it in its entirety, not the naked savage who

has the brains of a child, but the touch of it you do want." And she added, bravely: "Perhaps your race needs it. Perhaps you have obeyed a need without knowing it."

His face set in hard lines again. He took his hands from her shoulders. "It may be inbred prejudice, but it'll be the thing will survive longest in me."

Freda did not say that she doubted the assertion, but when he told her with a twist of his features that betokened pain: "I'm meaning to send for Marie. I'll not see her again," she smiled a little sadly. She was quite right; it depended largely on Marie—very largely.

But she said, practically enough: "Send for her as soon as you like. Her room will be ready for her, one of the rooms you used to have; the room that looks over the garden."

LIII

MENDALL FOLLOWS

AS soon as the noise of MacAllister's quick going had died, Mrs. Mendall took his message up to Marie. She gave it through the closed door, waiting only long enough to be assured that Marie heard. She had rapped and then spoken as quickly as possible, for fear the girl would open the door. Marie was stirring; from the sudden silence that followed, Mrs. Mendall knew she had heard.

She hurried away then. She did not want to see Marie; she had a dread of seeing her; she hoped she would never see her again; that MacAllister would send her away from Laclasse. She felt certain he would do that. It was the only bit of comfort the morning had brought her. It would be easier then for her to take up life again, and try to forget the break. Carl would be obsessed for a time, but after a space of restlessness he would forget. That was his nature.

Mendall was still in the reception room when she came down. She had left him at the window, looking after MacAllister, and now he had begun to walk the floor, aimlessly, yet in an excited way, the same ex-

citement he had shown when he had told MacAllister that his home was Marie's as long as she needed it.

He looked up when she came in. "Have you left her alone up there?" he demanded angrily. "You might at least have stopped to say a word to her! One would think a woman would have that much pity in her!"

Mrs. Mendall had often seen him angry at others, grow black and curse them roundly, but in all her knowledge of him he had never given her a rough word. He had often been careless, frequently unapproachable, and even more frequently silent and depressed, but never harsh or angry.

She shrank a little under his anger, though she felt it was undeserved. "I couldn't. How could you expect it of me, Carl? And she wouldn't want it. I can't help being glad that she is going. She has brought nothing but trouble to us and to Mr. MacAllister—and to herself."

"He has thrown her away—gone and left her! It is enough to drive her mad!" Mendall said passionately. "And you refused her a roof—even for a night. I saw her face when she went out from here. She's in despair."

"Mr. MacAllister told her he would care for her, Carl, and he will."

"Yes, thrown her a bone—as he would a dog! . . . She won't take it. She'll do something desperate instead."

Mrs. Mendall said nothing. There was no use in

arguing with him while he was in this mood. It would be utterly useless to talk of her own pain or of his culpability. He was thinking of Marie to the exclusion of every one and everything else. There was nothing for her to do but to endure and be patient.

When she spoke it was gently. "It has all been terrible, Carl. I know she is suffering. We have all suffered. But life will have to go on just the same. Let us try to be patient with each other, dear. It is the only thing we can do. . . . Come down with me now, and let me give you something to eat. You will be ill; you had no supper, and you have had no breakfast. The new maid is here. I will send her up to Marie. Please come, Carl."

Eat! While his brain was afire and his heart rising into his mouth, choking him! Go down and allow himself to be surrounded by the eternal routine, the little every-day things, while there was pounding in him the realization that Marie was discredited, cast aside, desperate! Even if she took MacAllister's help, she would be sent away from Laclasse. It was of that he was thinking.

"I don't want anything," he said in a smothered way. "Send the girl up to her, if that is the best you can do. She ought not to be alone."

Mrs. Mendall stood for a moment, watching him, while she gathered decision. If he had a particle of love for her, what she had to tell him must draw his thoughts to her and to the future they must try to live out together. She had decided in the night that as

soon as Marie had gone from their house forever she would tell him. When he knew, his arms would circle her. They *must* circle her. It would kill her if they did not.

She came close to him, stood before him, stopping him in his walk. "Carl—" she said softly, all the love she had for him risen into her eyes.

But Mendall neither heard nor saw her. He was listening, with head upflung. A door above had opened, Marie's door, and then there was the sound of her steps on the stairs. She came along the hall, passed their door like a shadow, and went out; across the porch, out through the grove and over the crest of the hill.

Mrs. Mendall had been so gripped by the dread that she was going to come in to them that she did not move. But Mendall saw Marie distinctly as she passed the door. He looked after her as she went, his brows drawn in anxiety.

"She is going to wander around out there," he said, more to himself than to Mrs. Mendall. "I must go after her—she'll do a harm to herself in the end. I've been afraid of it from the moment he turned her down. That's why I wanted you to go and talk to her. Didn't you see her face just now—she is beside herself."

His fear jerked Mrs. Mendall away from thoughts of herself and of him, into terror and bewilderment. "Oh, Carl—she wouldn't! . . . What *shall* we do!"

"Yes, she would. She's the kind would do it. I'll have to go after her." He stiffened suddenly, his ear

caught by a sound, the distant rumble of the suburban car. "God, Margaret! I believe she's gone to the car! If she gets it, there's no way of following her!"

Mrs. Mendall had regained some of her usual self-control. "We must go after her, Carl, and take her to Mr. MacAllister—it's the only thing—"

But Mendall was already in the hall. He stopped only to catch up his hat, and then he ran, through the grove and over the hill.

LIV

A POSSIBILITY

MENDALL almost missed the car. He caught it only by running for it. From the crest of the hill he had seen it rounding the curve in the cut below, and as he plunged down the hillside he saw Marie get in. It started; then, at his call, stopped again to take him on. He was panting and breathless both from exertion and a very genuine fear.

He waited on the platform for a time to catch his breath and calm himself somewhat before joining Marie. Then he went in and sat down beside her.

She did not see him. She sat with eyes fixed on space, her face contracting occasionally, as if stabbed by pain; otherwise it was expressionless. She was haggard, gray-lipped and heavy-eyed. There was the look of the sleep-walker about her; as if her faculties were in abeyance. Mendall sat quietly beside her for a time, watching her, and then touched her, put his hand on hers.

Marie's recognition of his presence was slow and vague. She looked down at his hand, then turned as slowly and looked at him. There was not a trace of her usual feline intentness in the gaze she fixed on

him. Her eyes were slightly clouded, as if she saw imperfectly. She showed no surprise at his presence; she did not even speak.

"Where are you going, Marie?" he asked.

She answered as slowly as she had moved. "I—don't—know—"

"Do you know where you want to go?"

"No—" Then she added, with an effort. "They were coming for me—I wish to go away."

Mendall realized that she was even more dazed than he had thought. He saw that she had only her small hand-bag with her.

"I am going to stay with you till you know what you want to do. I came after you because I saw that you were not fit to be alone," he said, much as he would have spoken to a dazed and troubled child.

Marie made no answer, and evidently not because she was taken aback by his presence, or by what he said.

"Were you thinking of going away from Laclasse?" Mendall asked next.

"Yes—I want to go on the train." And as if the mental exertion required for her answer had reminded her of something, she clutched at the hand-bag which had slipped from her lax hold. She opened it with the uncertain movements of an aged person, saw that it contained her purse, and dropped back into an indifference that seemed to make her oblivious of his presence.

And Mendall was silent. He was trying to decide

what to do. He felt certain that, if urged to return, or if any way coerced, Marie would wake to a blind rage, or to some desperate act. She was temporarily irresponsible; numbed by shock, and with only the animal instinct to wander away from the place where she had been hurt; into some corner where she could be hidden; the same instinct that makes an animal drag itself into a corner to die. It was MacAllister who had struck her; she was crawling away from him; from the thing that hurt, and without a thought, so far, of the future. If he urged her to go back with him, she knew it would mean that she was being taken back to MacAllister.

Possibly it was the thought of MacAllister, Mendall's deep-seated jealousy of him, possibly the consciousness that he was alone with Marie, riding on with her into uncertainty, that brought the temptation to Mendall; the sudden overwhelming suggestion, the possibility of going with Marie, away from Laclasse, away from the bonds of domesticity, from the torment of teaching, from the life he loathed and a thousand times had longed to leave. Freedom and Marie—her companionship, her inspiration—perhaps, in time, something closer—whatever he could win from her! . . . The possibility had come upon Mendall with the force of a shock, wrapped him in heat, and left him quick-breathing with excitement and purposeful. . . . It was the perfect feasibility of the thing that overwhelmed him, that beat down the thought of Margaret, every restraining suggestion. He would not

even have to go back to a painful scene. He could simply go on with Marie, and write to his wife. . . . The opportunity to paint, and Marie! It was too much for him.

He rode on beside Marie in a silence as complete as her own, his excited imagination painting the future. He troubled her with no more questions until they came into Laclasse, past the stock-yards and through the conglomerate collection of factories, tenement houses and cheap stores, to the crowded junction of the several car-lines leading into Laclasse; it was the end of the suburban line.

Marie roused a little to look about her.

"Were you meaning to go to the station?" Mendall asked.

"Yes—but I do not know the car."

"We'll find that out. I'm going with you."

"You go into Laclasse, then?"

She evidently attached no significance to what he said. She appeared to have forgotten that he had followed her purposely; that he had said so.

The descent into the heat, and the dust and rattle of coming and going cars seemed to confuse her. Mendall had never seen her look helpless; she looked so now, almost as if she would faint. He had planned a little in his erratic fashion. He drew her beneath the awning of the corner store.

"Come into the shade while we talk a little. . . . Marie, I heard what went on this morning. I don't blame you for not wanting to be beholden to MacAllis-

ter any longer. If I were in your place, I should want to go. I want to help you—I followed you because I wanted to help you. Tell me where you want to go, and I'll help you to go."

At mention of MacAllister, Marie's brows contracted sharply. "That is why I go away—I do not wish to give him any more trouble. . . . I want to go a long way—where he will not follow. There I can find something to do." Suffering and faintness had brought the moisture to her lips and brow. She had begun to tremble. Mendall's offer of help seemed to have made no impression on her. She was thinking of MacAllister to the exclusion of everything else.

"Would you go to New York?" Mendall suggested.

"Yes . . . it does not matter," she said faintly. "I know that place."

Mendall had guessed that would be her answer. "Then let me plan for you a little. It's not one o'clock yet, and there is no train going east until evening. You are ill, Marie. You are in no condition to sit at the station for hours. If you collapse, there is no one to take you in but MacAllister. What you must do is to rest until evening. There is a little hotel here, in the next block. It's a cheap place, but it's respectable. If you will go there and lie down, I'll go on into Laclasse. I'll find out about trains, and then I'll come back for you and take you to the station. . . . Will you, Marie?"

She acquiesced after a moment's knitting of her brows; perhaps because even in her numbness she was

conscious of feeling ill, and the suggestion that she would be upon MacAllister's hands was a spur that pricked her into decision. The heat was already making her dizzy.

"Yes. Then I can think a little."

"Come with me then."

It was a poor place into which he brought her, a small commercial hotel, an adjunct to a lunch room. But it was clean. There was only a stupid-looking boy at the desk when they came in, for it was the noon hour and the proprietor was busy in the lunch room.

Mendall seated Marie while he made arrangements. He placed no names on the register, though he made a feint of doing so while the boy searched for a key. He hurried the boy into forgetfulness; he wanted tea and some lunch sent up immediately. Mendall was too excited to be hungry, but things about him had begun to look curiously white and unreal, as he guessed they looked to Marie.

When they reached the room above, he thought Marie was going to faint. He took off her hat, brought her water for her face and hands and, when the tea came, made her take some. When he had eaten something himself, he lost the feeling of unreality, but none of the tenseness that held him. And Marie looked less ghastly and vague.

"You take much trouble for me," she said, more in her usual manner.

Mendall dreaded beyond anything the possibility of Marie's return to reason before he put her on the train

for New York. His plan had grown into completeness. The same train would carry them both to New York, but she should not know that until she reached the end of her journey. He meant to give her no hint of his intention.

Mendall did not have what he called evil intentions toward Marie. Even if such a thing had been possible to him, he had far too high an estimate of Marie's intelligence to think for a moment that he could entrap her into wrong-doing. What would be her attitude to him when she discovered that they were together in the same city he did not know. But they would both be homeless, both looking for employment, and the rest of the world strangers to them. And there would be no MacAllister. That was ended. What acuteness Mendall possessed was bent upon carrying his adventure through. What Marie would give him remained to be seen.

He wished intensely that he did not have to leave her. But he must go into Laclasse before the banks closed; that was the first necessity. If only she would go to sleep. In her exhausted state she would sleep for hours.

He shook up the pillows on the bed and drew down the blinds. "Come and lie down," he urged. "See if you can't sleep. I'll sit by you for a little while."

Marie did as he asked. But her eyes did not close. She lay staring at the ceiling. Presently she turned her head and looked about the room.

It was meanly furnished, much as the room in the

decrepit hotel from which she had crept secretly not more than three months before. The dimness of the place, yellowed by the sun on the dingy window-shades, gave it an aspect that carried her back to that night. She was going as she had come, only with far less. She was discredited, despised by the man whom she loved. The review of all that had passed since that night when she had planned her deceit brought her to the wreckage and the despair of the present. She shivered, with a sharp intake of breath, her face twisting in agony, and suddenly she began to weep, slow tears at first, and then with a shaking of her entire body and a heaving of her chest that made lying still impossible. She drew herself up and sat with knees clasped and head bent to the storm that swept her.

Mendall had never heard or seen such weeping, deep, convulsive, rending. It was not hysteria, she did not scream, she only moaned and whispered like a soul twisted, tortured, utterly lost. "I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead! . . . What does it matter what becomes of me! I am yellow—I'm accursed—I'm a golden woman of the Isthmus, like my mother! I wish I were dead—!"

She sank forward on the bed, her clutching fingers dragging at its covering until she lay in the midst of dishevelment, writhing and twisting in intolerable agony.

Mendall could not endure it. He forgot caution, everything. He lifted Marie up and held her tightly. What he said to her while the storm lasted he never

knew with exactness; certainly that he was hers and would never leave her. That he was going with her and going to care for her. And whether comforted by what he said, or because of the same convulsive necessity to clutch and cling to something that had made her grip and drag at the bed-clothes, Marie clung to him.

Mendall held her and talked to her. He kissed her convulsed face, her heaving shoulders, her wet and tangled hair. It was not so much a passion of love as a passion of pity that moved him, that emotionalism of his that his wife had never learned to capture. If it were possible for Margaret Mendall to weep with such utter savage abandon, he would never have left her.

Mendall talked to Marie and soothed her, until little by little she relaxed into after-weeping, the dry sobs that at gradually lengthening intervals caught her and shook her. He held her until she lay still, except for her irregular breathing, as relaxed as in a faint. Mendall thought at first that she was slipping into unconsciousness—until he remembered the sleep of exhaustion that had held her while he had carried her up the hillside. She had wept like that once before, and dropped into sleep.

He laid her back against the pillows finally, and stood looking down at her. The only sign she gave of stirred consciousness was a half lifting of her swollen eyelids, an edge of white that showed and then was gone. He knew that she slept, just as she had slept

beneath the cottonwoods in the ravine. She would sleep through the afternoon—until he returned and roused her. And if he was going to take her away, he *must* go, and at once.

Mendall did not risk waking her by even so much as a touch. He wanted too intensely the thing he felt certain now the future would bring him. With her beside him, how he would paint! . . . He watched a little longer, then softly went out.

LV

A RACE WITH THE WIND

IT was after sundown when MacAllister came back again through the grove to the Mendalls' door, the third journey his car had made that day. The chauffeur he had sent for Marie had returned with a message which had brought MacAllister to the Mendall house with all the speed he could make.

The maid who admitted him was not Lucy. She was a white girl, but no more intelligent looking than the mulatto. MacAllister saw at once that she knew nothing of disturbing circumstances; she was too evidently surprised by his air of haste and excitement. He was roughened by the wind and very pale.

"Where is Mrs. Mendall?" he demanded.

She told him that Mrs. Mendall was not well; that she was lying down.

"In her room?"

MacAllister did not wait for her answer, but pushed by her to the open door of Mrs. Mendall's room. Her small figure lay propped against the pillows. Her white face and heavily circled eyes warned MacAllister of tragedy.

But when his stride brought him to her her voice

was calm: "Will you please close the door, Mr. MacAllister?"

MacAllister shut it and came back to her. "I got yer message saying just that Marie'd gone. What's happened to her?" He was grim in his anxiety.

Mrs. Mendall looked up at him as he towered over her. "She went after I told her that you were going to send for her. She came down and went without a word to anybody—and Carl followed her—" She stopped.

"Weel, and what then?"

"She has gone away—and Carl has gone with her."

MacAllister did not grasp her meaning in the least. On the contrary, he relaxed into a degree of relief. "Weel, he'll see no harm comes to her!" It was quite another fear that had ridden with him over those miles of speed.

Mrs. Mendall scarcely knew how to tell him. "He has gone away with her—and to stay. . . . My husband loves Marie, Mr. MacAllister; he has loved her for some time. He says, in the letter he sent out to me by a messenger, that you had thrown her away, and he was going with her; that they would be on their way when his letter reached me. He is taking her to New York, where he says he is going to take a studio and paint. . . . She was desperate—I don't think she knew what she was doing when she left here, so I think he has persuaded her."

MacAllister had received the blow standing, and he still stood—through the moments of realization—long

enough for a distinct remembrance of Marie's face when she had turned away from him, and of Mendall's look of excitement and defiance.

Then, with a smothered word, he went to the window, for strong man though he was, he felt the need of air, some relief from the rush of blood that strangled him. This was a deal worse than Kraup's hands on his throat. . . . He struggled with suffocation through the moments it took him to array the facts, to gage the possibilities and the certainties—and to grant his part in a tragedy which was even a worse thing than the fear he had brought with him. Mrs. Mendall heard his thick accusation of himself:

"And 'twas I drove her to it."

MacAllister could think clearly enough in a crisis. Disaster did not daze him or distract him; it urged him to immediate and definite action, but with all his faculties under control. He could command calmness, just as Mrs. Mendall could command it.

He came back to her. "Will ye tell me now, please —how it's come about—this thing ye've told me? I'll know then how best to do the only thing there is to be done."

Mrs. Mendall knew what it was he wanted to be told. "I didn't suspect until the night of Mrs. Kotany's dance. I couldn't believe it then. I thought only that there was danger to Carl in Marie's being in our house, and I decided she must go. But I had to wait until you came. That night—last night—Carl told me. I asked him directly. He confessed that he

loved Marie. He said that he loved me still, but that she had the same fascination for him as his painting." Then, because Mrs. Mendall had reached the depths that day, and out of the depths had evolved a philosophy that she meant should sustain her in the future, she was honest. "And I feel that, in a way, I am responsible for what has happened this afternoon. If, after you left, I had gone to Marie and spoken kindly, all this might not have happened. And, Mr. MacAllister, Carl told me that Marie had never tried to tempt him or play with him."

MacAllister was bitter in his condemnation of the man who meant to profit by his own harshness. "Yer husband loves ye, does he, and he's left ye like this! And now he'd take advantage of Marie! I haven't words for the like of him!" It was a flash of jealous anger that caught him and shook him.

Mrs. Mendall looked at him steadily. Her body was weak, but there was determination in her eyes. "Mr. MacAllister, I don't want to hear Carl spoken of in that way. I am trying not to think of him in that way. I know him as no one else does, and yet, I think that to-day, for the first time, I have really understood him. He is a man with a fixed idea that completely dominates him. No man with a fixed idea is quite sane. I think, if kept to his life here, he would have gone mad. His going away was a sort of wild attempt at self-preservation, and his infatuation for Marie is part of the same struggle. He has gone, and I believe he will paint in spite of everything. His painting is more to

him than any woman, more than anything else in the world, and I believe some day he will be a great artist. . . . I want to think about Carl in this way, Mr. MacAllister—no matter what comes or what any one has to say about it. I mean to think kindly about everybody, because thinking any other way will hurt me. I don't intend to be despairing or bitter or angry. I mean to be calm and courageous."

She looked the things she said she meant to be, as she lay there; even her assertions were made with a certain restraint, a consideration for herself.

MacAllister had no answer to it all, though her courage touched him. She was the more pathetic because of it. He had always liked her, and never more than now. But her beliefs did not alter facts, and time spent in talk was a waste of precious moments. He must get back to town at once. And it was borne in upon MacAllister that, in a measure, he was responsible for this disrupted household; he had, in a way, forced Marie upon Mrs. Mendall and, without realizing, had thrown Marie to any one who would give her comfort.

"Ye're right to face the future in that spirit," he said more kindly. "There're not many could do it. . . . But I'm thinking about what ye'll do right now. Ye can't stay here."

She had evidently planned a little. "I must find a place to stay in Laclasse."

"It's best ye should not even stay the night here. I must go back as fast as I can. Just put a few things

together, and come on in with me. Ye can get what's necessary later. The girl must come too. I'll not consent to leave ye two women here alone."

Mrs. Mendall sat up. "But I have no idea yet where to go." She was trying to conquer the desolation that swept her at the thought of leaving her home. It was almost too much, even for her determined courage. And yet the night spent alone there would be a horror.

"I know where ye'll go," MacAllister said decidedly. "It's to Freda O'Rourke. There's no finer or straighter woman in this world than Freda, Mrs. Mendall. She's got a large heart in her. Ye have none too easy a road to travel. Freda'll take ye in and never ask a question. Ye'll be sheltered in her house."

MacAllister did not wait for her consent. He lifted her from the bed, as he would a child, and set her on her feet. He was afraid of the dazed look that had dawned in her eyes, and yet he must hurry her, for there was need of all the haste he could make. "Just hold to that courage of yours," he said reassuringly. "Ye've got good friends in Laclasse, Mrs. Mendall. I'm one of them. We'll see ye through, never fear. Just do as I tell ye, now."

An hour later, while Freda O'Rourke helped to the room that was to have been Marie's the white-faced, steady-eyed woman MacAllister had brought in to her out of the darkness, MacAllister walked the floor and waited.

His instructions to Freda had been of the briefest: "Take her up and tell her yer house shall be her home. Ye know ye can trust me. Do just that, and then come back quickly to me—I've things to tell ye."

Freda had done what he asked without a question. One look at his face had told her that here was some tragedy she could not fathom. When she came down, her eyes asked what her lips feared to formulate.

MacAllister told her in the briefest sentences at his command.

Freda was aghast. "What will you do?" she asked, too much overwhelmed for the moment for anything but an involuntary question.

"Follow them—by the first train I can get."

The hot color in Freda's cheeks deepened, lighting her eyes. "Poor Marie—" she said, more to herself than to MacAllister. Then more clearly: "And that poor thing up-stairs, Alex—?"

"Just ye keep her to the courage she says she has, Freda. I've told her I was going, and I gave her my promise I'd not mishandle her husband, and I'll try to remember it. He may go to hell! The *cur!* He'll not hold Marie a moment—once I set eyes on her!" The fiery heat of primitive rage and jealousy had caught him and swept him again. It was strangled in turn by the cold hand of Fear. "I want to get to her so quick as I can," he added thickly. "There's no telling what she'll do when she comes to herself. . . . Freda, we've agreed, Mrs. Mendall and I, that no one shall know of all this. I mean to act care-

fully. The first train I can get is in the morning, but there're things I can do to-night. I'll send a night letter to the people who traced that man Mortola for me. They'll be watched for in New York. I've my plan well in mind; God knows I've had time enough to plan, riding over those fearful miles." He ended with some degree of calmness.

It was evident to Freda that his executive brain was working swiftly and accurately, and she knew that his planning rarely miscarried. But it was of something else she was thinking while he talked. She realized that, in spite of his fear and his genuine regret and his revulsion of feeling toward Marie, it was passion still that was driving him, a commingling of jealousy and desire. And Freda also knew that, however much he might regret his part in Marie's tragedy, his judgment of her wild act would be the same. He had generations of men behind him who had thought and felt just as he did about the missteps women made. Marie had set the seal upon his lack of trust; proved her weakness; definitely placed herself beyond the pale. The test would come when he had taken Marie from Mendall. He would be taking her from another man, a woman whom in his heart he did not respect and yet whom he desired—and a woman who loved him in primitive fashion. The greatest danger to them both lay in that last fact.

She put her hand on his arm. "Alex, be really kind to her when you find her," she begged. "You meant to punish her. You have been a little hard."

MacAllister looked down at her hand. "I know," he said, and his face twisted in pain. "I drove her to it, and God only knows what will come of it all."

But Freda had only been leading up to what she meant to say. "Yes, you did, Alex. So be your best self to her—when you take her away from him. It may be in your power to—to hinder her, not help her. Remember that she will be a woman with every defense down."

MacAllister looked up quickly, met her eyes fairly. "Is that yer opinion of me?" he asked hotly.

"No. It is to her I would give the warning, not to you—if I could reach her. . . . It is their feeling that there is no genuine forgiveness for them in the heart of any man—or woman—that has determined the future of most women who have done what Marie has done, Alex."

MacAllister turned away. "That's true enough," he said, a little indistinctly. "I'll remember what ye've said, Freda. . . . If only I could reach her this minute—"

Then he left her.

LVI

SUSPENSE

IN the days that followed MacAllister learned the meaning of *suspense.*

He learned that every detective force, however capable, moves slowly; that there are times when money can not buy haste; that America is a wide country, and that even the telegraph and the telephone are but partial assistants; that sifting New York's five millions in search of two strays is a monumental undertaking.

MacAllister's journey had consumed nearly three days. And there had been no relief awaiting him when he reached New York. The arriving through trains had been watched; they had not brought Mendall and Marie. The subsequent trains did not bring them. But there were innumerable roundabout ways by which they might have come. The keen-eyed men MacAllister consulted made various suggestions, among others that Mendall's letter to his wife might have been merely a blind; that Mendall might have gone west or south or north; that he might have buried himself and Marie in Chicago; that he might have stopped anywhere on the way; that their search

ought to begin in Laclasse, that one of their most reliable men ought to be sent to Laclasse, while they searched New York.

MacAllister agreed to the last suggestion, for he shrank from entrusting the facts to any one in Laclasse. It meant an expenditure of three additional days, but his horror of what publicity would mean, counseled caution.

While stretching a long arm to Laclasse, MacAllister remained in New York, for he was not to be urged out of the conviction that Mendall had brought Marie to New York, and that his first concern would be to secure a cheap studio in the artists' quarter. So MacAllister walked the hot streets with his anxiety, circled around and about and through Washington Square, Greenwich Village, Irving Place and Gramercy Park. The hotels and the area about Carnegie Hall he left to the men he employed. In order to avoid people he knew, he took care not to show himself at the large hotels or on Wall Street. He purposely chose the Brevoort as his stopping place and haunted the Italian restaurants of the neighborhood.

For five nights MacAllister shared the close air of Washington Square with hundreds of sweltering Italians, for, except when exhausted, he was too restless to sleep. He could not plan for the future; the strain and uncertainty of the present were too much for him. When he tried to think of the future it became either a jumble or a blank. Sometimes the vision of Marie with Mendall drove him almost mad; more often he

was obsessed by fear, frozen by it. If only he could find her!

So for five days—a year of blazing July days, it seemed to him—MacAllister climbed stairs to inspect studios he did not want, interviewed smudgy janitors, sad-faced landladies, and brainless guardians of unhappy looking telephone exchanges. He knew that those he employed were doing the same thing, but to sit still and wait was beyond him. He had, at least, the comfort of entering each place with hope.

On the morning of the sixth day, a brief telegram brought him the first word: Carl Mendall had been seen in St. Louis—that particulars would follow later. There was nothing about Mendall's traveling companion, but where Mendall was, Marie was—unless?

It was that ever present fear that drove MacAllister out to walk, as usual, around and across Washington Square, and, as usual, he scanned the houses, old residences most of them, that had been converted into studios. They were among the first places he had visited, and upon which he had kept constant watch. A dozen times he had paused to watch, and as many times had followed some erect youthful man who had crossed his vision, but who was too far away for recognition. Some clean-limbed Italian, he had usually discovered him to be.

This morning, from the middle of the Square, he saw striding along Fourth Street a man who instantly riveted his attention, a young man with a parcel under his arm. He ran up the steps of one of the oldest

studio buildings in the Square, paused for a backward glance, then went in. MacAllister was keen-sighted; he thought he could not be mistaken.

The sudden lift of MacAllister's heart brought the blood into his face; then like a hound that has sighted its quarry, he was off. The doors of the house stood open, and he plunged in upon a man who was whistling softly as he mopped the broken tiling of the hall.

"Who just came in?" MacAllister demanded.

The man stopped whistling and stared at him. He was accustomed to invasions of all sorts, but there was that about MacAllister that startled him.

"What do you want of him?" he retorted.

MacAllister did not stop to parley. At the sight of the bill MacAllister held out to him the man dropped his mop and touched his forehead. "He's a sublet, sir. Came in yesterday. Mr. McDonald's studio—if you'll wait a minute I'll ask the janitress."

But MacAllister was already on the stairs. "It's the top floor back—" the man called after him.

MacAllister knew what he meant by "a sublet." Every studio on the Square appeared to be for rent for the summer months. He went up three flights of stairs into a dim hall. He knew his way about; he had been in the house before, so he went directly to the door bearing the plate,

ERNEST McDONALD

Because his breath failed him, MacAllister waited for a few moments; he had run through the Square

and up three long flights of stairs. As he waited he heard movements within, some article, an easel probably, drawn across the floor.

Then he knocked, and a voice he knew called, "Come in!"

MacAllister walked in under a skylight that made the bareness of the room glaring. In the center of the room, before a newly stretched canvas, coat and collar removed, shirt-sleeves rolled up, and with paints and palette at his knee, sat Mendall; a little pale and pinched, and moist about the brow from the stifling heat.

For a mere second MacAllister looked into Mendall's face, and then his eyes traveled over the room, the gray walls of great height, the wide divan that was a bed, a clutter of painting paraphernalia, a table bearing the remains of a meager breakfast—but there was no sign of the woman he sought.

His eyes came back to Mendall, the look of a fighting man with desperate urgency behind his anger. "Where's Marie?"

Mendall had sprung up, and his answer was flung at MacAllister from beneath brows that had lowered into a straight line. "With you, isn't she?"

MacAllister came close to him, so close that his clenched fist could have reached him. It was not his promise to Mrs. Mendall that restrained him; he had forgotten it, as completely as he had forgotten many things. He might be able to beat the man into unconsciousness; he might even kill him, but it was Marie

he wanted, and he doubted whether that was the best way of reaching her. If he himself had taken a woman and meant to keep her, it would not be a man's fist that would stop him.

"I asked ye, *'Where is Marie?'*" he demanded, through his teeth. "Ye took her out of Laclasse—where is she?"

"I did not take her from Laclasse. I left her there. She said she was going 'to some one who in spite of everything' would receive her. She meant you, didn't she?"

Though Mendall faced him with lip curled and brows as threatening as his own, there was a ring of sincerity and a touch of genuine questioning in his answer that halted MacAllister. The man looked him too squarely in the eye.

MacAllister answered involuntarily. "Marie's not with me! She never came nigh me—or I'd not be here!"

Mendall's brows lifted and his eyes widened, the color of anger wiped from his face. "But she wrote me she was going to you—I thought she meant you! . . . Where is she?"

MacAllister's face grew blank. "That's what I came to ask of ye. . . . Why—*man* . . . are ye meaning to tell me ye've not seen her since that day! . . . There was no friend she could go to—and—but for a bit of pocket-money, she had nothing—"

"No, I've not seen her! Certainly I've not seen her!" Mendall declared. "I've no idea where she is!

. . . I followed her because I was afraid she would do herself a harm. She didn't know what she was doing—what she wanted was to get as far away from you as she could. For two years I've been mad to leave Laclasse. I decided then that we would go away together. She was too dazed to know anything—she only half recognized me. I wanted her in some safe place where she could rest while I went in to the bank and got some money. I took her from the Bellevue car to the hotel at the Junction. I meant her no harm, and I did her no harm. I meant she should be a free lance here just as I was. If she gave me anything I meant it should be willingly. She cried herself to sleep. I left her asleep. When I got back from the bank I found her note. I thought she had gone to you. . . . I had written to Margaret—I'd made the break—I decided I'd go on. I went to St. Louis, then to John Thane, the big oil man. I sold him a painting he liked once, and I thought he'd be the sort to loan me some money to go on with if I'd contract to paint him something more of the same kind. I wanted Margaret to have most of what we had in bank. Thane did loan me money, and then I came on here. . . . I've told you all I know."

Mendall had jerked out his explanation through tight lips, the same fear that was blanching MacAllister's face dawning in his own.

"What did she write ye?" MacAllister asked with difficulty.

Mendall went to his coat and brought back to him

a piece of paper that had been torn across and hastily written upon. MacAllister read it aloud, tonelessly:

"Señor, I am glad I have waked before you came. I thank you for your kindness. But for you, I should have become quite insane. Now I am very calm. I go to one who in spite of everything I think will receive me. Señor, think no more of me or of my fate. Go your way and paint beautifully. That is your future. For me there is but one thing.

"MARIE."

The two men looked at each other; each looking at the fear in the other's face, and with no thought of anything else. "It's her Maker she was thinking would receive her," MacAllister said finally, in a voice that had lost modulation. "If it should be so—" He gave Mendall the note, mechanically, and turned to go. "I'll be searching still, but with only fear of what I'll find," he added in the same even way, quite as he would have spoken to the empty room.

"I meant her no harm," Mendall said in a low voice. His half whisper reached MacAllister, recalling his presence to him. He paused at the door. "Ye'll be staying here, I suppose," he said indifferently. "I'm going back to Laclasse. Yer wife's with Freda O'Rourke—have ye any word to send her?"

"No. I wrote her yesterday—everything. She's better off where she is." Mendall drew a long breath, shook himself and took up his palette. "No matter what comes—I've got to paint."

LVII

WHAT DID HE MEAN TO DO?

THREE days later, a little after the noon hour, MacAllister came up the steps of the O'Rourke house and into the hall, pausing at the dining-room door to speak to the waitress.

"Tell Miss Freda I'm here, Celia—that I want to see her."

Celia had known MacAllister for several years; she had never seen him look like this. "Have you been sick, sir?" she asked with concern.

"No, only tired from the journey," MacAllister said heavily. "Just ye tell Miss Freda I want a word with her before I go over to the office."

MacAllister crossed to the library and put down his traveling bag. He had come directly from the station, and the dust and heat of the train still hung about him, making him look even more haggard. The lines of his body, the droop of his usually erect shoulders, suggested both illness and hopelessness.

He did not straighten, even when Freda came in. He looked at her eager face from beneath brows that appeared to be weighted with the same burden that

bent his shoulders. "Weel, Freda, I'm back," he said. "Ye had my telegram telling ye I'd seen Mendall. I suppose ye've no word for me?"

Freda's quick eyes had swept him for a moment without comprehending. Then she understood, almost to the point of tears. *"Alex!* You didn't get my telegram! I sent it yesterday."

"No, I've had no telegram . . . Freda! Yer not telling me that—?"

"Of course I'm telling you—just that!" Freda exclaimed. "Oh, Alex! And you have been these three days without knowing! . . . Marie is safe, dear. She has come to no harm."

The crimson flood of relief that blinded MacAllister and set him to groping for a chair frightened Freda. Any one who has seen a strong man stricken into helplessness, big hands grown suddenly shaking and uncertain, powerful body tottering, never loses the terror of it. It had been so with her father. Freda's arms went about MacAllister as he sat breathing heavily.

"Alex—"

"'Twas—a bit—too much for me—" MacAllister gasped. Then more steadily: "Eh, I've frightened ye, Freda. . . . It's nothing—just the relief of it. Where is she?"

But Freda had gone for iced water.

When she came back MacAllister was standing up. "I'm all right," he declared, in answer to her fright and urgency. "Ye need that a deal more than I do —ye're as white as paper. . . . It's just as well I've

learned that it's apoplexy will carry me off—I'll be guarded against too much joy."

There was nothing that could have cured Freda's fright more quickly than MacAllister's return to dry speech. The touch of shame at his own unexpected weakness was also wholesome. She was instantly her usual well-controlled self.

She smiled at him. "I wish you might have been saved these three days."

MacAllister put his hands on her shoulders. "Perhaps ye'll tell me now, ye messenger of relief?" he begged. "Where is she?"

"Not here—a long way from here—in Southern California—but no harm has come to her. . . . She went to Clare Bagsby for help, Alex. Clare told me yesterday. It seems the girls are friends. Marie told Clare her whole history—except her experience with Carl Mendall. Clare kept her for the night, and in the morning Marie left for Los Angeles. Clare gave her a little money. She asked Clare to tell you where she had gone, but to make it clear to you that she did not want to see you and would take nothing from you. She said to Clare, 'Everything is ended between Monsieur MacAllister and me. And it is best that it should be so.' Clare said Marie looked like death when she came to her; that she was the saddest and the calmest woman she had ever seen, and that the only real emotion she showed was when she spoke of you; that the only thing that seemed really to matter to her was the fact that she had deceived you. The tears came in

Clare's eyes as she talked of Marie. She said Marie seemed to have a sort of indifferent confidence that she would find employment. She couldn't persuade Marie to stay here. She told Clare quite frankly that she did not want to live, but she intended to go on because there was nothing else for her to do. That her religion forbade her doing any such wild thing as you have feared. Clare said the impression Marie made on her was that of utter desolation, and at the same time a steady going on with life. . . . After Marie had gone, Clare tried to see you, but was told that you had gone east on business. If Mr. Bagsby had been here, things might have moved more quickly. But he was in Lincoln. Clare told him when he came back. They waited a day, and then Clare came to me. Then I telegraphed you."

MacAllister said nothing when she had finished. He had taken his hands from her shoulders and stood now, looking down at the floor. The color relief had brought to his face had faded; he looked haggard again. Freda looked at him in her quietly observant way, the tenderness in her astir. If Marie had suffered, so had he. He would carry the marks of it with him always; the lines about his mouth were deeper, his brows more pent.

She touched his arm caressingly. "It's short in the telling, but long when measured by feeling, isn't it, Alex?"

He nodded. "Has there been any word from her since she went?" he asked with an effort.

"Yes, Clare has heard. Marie seems to think that some motion-picture company will employ her."

"That's been in her mind for some time." MacAllister was thinking of the evening on Twin Oaks Hill, when Marie had said, "There is only one thing I can do well—I can act." He remembered with peculiar distinctness her twisting, tortured hands.

He straightened, with a caught breath. "How did she write, Freda?"

"Clare left the letter. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes. It may tell me the thing I want to know."

Freda brought it to him.

"Dear Mademoiselle Clare," Marie wrote. "I have secured a stopping place at the above address. The journey I do not remember, only that we passed through much bare land that was hot. This country is also desert, except where man has made it green. It is perhaps a pleasant country—I do not know.

"For three days after I secured this room I could only lie still, but yesterday I went to the studios of one of the large motion-picture companies. Nothing may come of it, I will probably have to go day after day and wait about for a chance to be called upon, but if I am called upon to take some part the experience I have already had will be helpful. I may interest the director, and he may then give me another opportunity. I am quite accustomed to the ways of these motion-picture people—I understand their methods and how best to please them, and that is a great advantage. My room costs me very little and I care very little about food, so I can afford to wait. Sometimes it is to those who do not care in the least that success

comes. Perhaps it will be so with me. Perhaps in time I shall wish to succeed.

"Mademoiselle Clare, I can not write much, but one thing I wish to say from my heart—I thank you for your great kindness. Merely my money debt I will repay, but your heart of kindness I wish always to keep. Do you remember we talked once of women? I said that women were not friends to one another and that they would never be? I have changed my way of thinking, and because of you. I have changed my way of thinking about so very many things.

"One comfort I have had, Mademoiselle Clare. To-day I have gone to confessional—the first time in many, many months. I dared not go when I was living a lie, and it made me wretched. How could I have done what I did? Lie and steal. Was it the Indian in me that made it possible? Or is it always possible to the woman who loves like a primitive thing —who has just the immense wish to possess. Only by steady trying can I make something better of myself than the yellow thing I have been. I am like one who has been through death, who has drowned and only after long struggling with unconsciousness has been brought back to life. These last ten days seem a hundred years in which I have thought and thought. I know now what love should be—not the faulty thing I felt, nor the imperfect thing which was offered me, the sort of love that can be angry and cruel and bitter.

"I shall go on and do my best, Mademoiselle Clare. I shall write again. I say good-by now, with love for the woman who is kind. "MARIE.

"P. S. I call myself Maria de la Guarda here. Under that name I had some stage experience, and it is best that I be known by that name."

MacAllister had sat down to read the letter, and after he had finished it he continued to sit with it in his hand, thinking, seeing some vision of the past—or of the future.

Freda watched his reverie, wondering which it was? What did he mean to do? What had the last two weeks done to him? Melted anger, certainly, but had his love grown or had it lessened? Did he mean to seek Marie, or not? . . . The answer to these questions meant a good deal to Freda O'Rourke, but they were not questions she would ask of him. One reason for their fast friendship was because she had never claimed a confidence.

MacAllister put the letter down, finally, and turned to her. "How is Mrs. Mendall?" he asked, more in his usual manner.

Freda smiled. "You didn't know you were bringing me help when you brought her to me?"

"A sad burden, I thought—most of the things I bring ye are burdens." MacAllister was thinking of society's attitude to her, the thing that always outraged him.

"I don't find them so. Mrs. Mendall certainly is not. She's rather wonderful, Alex. It took her just twenty-four hours to decide about me—to shake herself free of prejudice. Then she came to me. She told me that she meant to make a life for herself. That she would never take her husband back, and not because she could not forgive him, but because theirs could never be the right sort of marriage; that theirs

had never been what marriage should be, and that with his nature and hers it never could be. She believes in his genius, that in time he will be a great artist, but that is the only faith she has in him. She told me that she meant to be one of the best-trained office women in Laclasse. That for a year—that is for as much of the year as she is able—she wants to go on with her training. She told me all her plans and her difficulties, and then she asked me, quite simply and sensibly, whether I did not need help in running this house, and with a timid audacity that took my heart offered her hands and brains to me. You know, Alex, what my trouble has always been—getting any sort of intelligent assistance in running this house. I haven't even sister's help; she has to look after father. . . . It went to my heart, that calm sensibleness of hers—a deal more directly than tragic tears. The tears were there, of course, but so well restrained. We emerged from that conference fast friends—we're bound together in one cause. You can help when the office period arrives, but meantime she is my partner." Freda ended as she had begun, smilingly, but there was an undercurrent of deep feeling stirring her.

"And I suppose none of all this was yer suggestion," MacAllister remarked with affectionate sarcasm.

"No. I simply took her in my arms—when I heard the reason for all that stiff-lipped courage of hers. . . . There is a baby coming in about seven months, Alex."

"Freda!" MacAllister's face grew black.

"Her husband didn't know!" Freda said quickly. "Keeping her own counsel appears to have been her habit. That's the sort of marriage theirs was, no sharing of confidence. She told me, Alex, that she was just going to tell him, the words were on her lips, when Marie came down the stairs, walking out into her future, and changed their destinies."

"The poor little woman—" MacAllister said.

"I said the same thing—internally—for the space of a minute. Then I came to my senses. Why, Alex, it's her salvation! She'll have a child to work for and care for and plan for. She's more mother than anything else. With her baby in her arms she'll be a thousand times more happy than she has ever been—and more lovable. And what it has done for her already! She has swept her mind clear of all the ugly things, anger and hatred and jealousy. A rather narrow-minded little New England woman growing into a wonder, and all because she is building a life that must not be marred. I like to see a woman prove herself as she is doing!" Freda was flushed and eager, beautiful in her earnestness.

MacAllister looked at her a little curiously, appreciative of her beauty—there was the beauty-loving man's admiration in his eyes—and something else, something more profound. "I believe that's what ye are, Freda—a lovable woman with motherhood the biggest thing in ye." It was one of his occasional flashes of intuition. Could any man ask more of life than the devotion of such a woman?

Freda flushed even more warmly. "It's in every one of us, Alex—deep down—though too often it's covered up by a wrong rearing and an unfortunate environment. Those two girls, Clare and Marie, in the night they spent together, talked of this very thing. Clare told me all about it. She told Marie that she meant to marry Ellis at Christmas and help him to make a man of himself, and Marie said, 'I am glad. Then in time there will be a little child to draw you both closer together. And you will know that both you and he will be giving that child a good inheritance. I have thought much about my inheritance, Mademoiselle Clare, and, though I have hated my Indian blood because of the doubts others have cast upon it, in my heart I do not feel that I should be giving a child a bad inheritance. My mother was truthful, faithful and gentle. And, in spite of what I have done, I have a moral sense. It was those fearful three years of struggle in Paris with every man's hand against me that pushed me into deceit, and then a wild love for a man that held me to it. It is a little comfort to feel in my own heart that, in spite of everything, I would be mother to a good child. That I am not accursed, as I have sometimes thought when in misery. But why do I talk of all this! Marriage and a child are not for me—prejudice and prejudgment will always be against me. I can do only the best that I can with my life.' "

Though he flushed deeply, MacAllister said nothing, and, in spite of the hurt it gave her, because of

the honesty that was Freda's first law, she continued decidedly: "I agree with Marie. I have never been afraid of her inheritance. I believe it would do a child no harm—good, rather. And I believe, Alex, that Marie will be successful in anything she undertakes—that's your blood in her. Her Spanish strain will make her a successful actress—if that is to be her future—and an alluring woman she will be to the end of her days. But it is the primitive in her that would make her a glorious wife and a very perfect mother."

The blood was still hot in MacAllister's cheeks. "Ye think the Indian is strong in her, then, Freda?"

"Strongest of all," Freda said decidedly. "It's her Indian blood will make her faithful, patient, loving and self-sacrificing. It was the Indian girl whom you captured and who captured you, Alex. The time will come when you will bless that golden streak of hers."

"Eh!" MacAllister said with a caught breath. "Perhaps—"

He got up abruptly and lifted his bag, then put it down again and came back to Freda. He took both her hands and kissed them. "There's one thing I've learned in all this," he said deeply, "and that is, that ye are the truest and the finest thing God ever made, Freda. However lovable, there's no woman living can touch ye." Then he went out quickly.

He had told her nothing; well as Freda knew him, she could not tell what was passing in his mind. But he had given her something, a tribute that circled her heart with warmth.

LVIII

THE SHOW CITY

IT was to Marie that MacAllister carried what was passing in his mind; across the great plains, "through much bare land that was hot," into the country which "is also desert, except where man has made it green," to Los Angeles, bone-dry and glaring white under the August sun.

MacAllister knew Southern California well; he had been in Los Angeles many times. He secured an automobile and drove out through the suburb that nestles against barren hills, to the pepper-tree-shaded bungalow in which Marie had "secured a stopping place." It was a small box-like cottage dignified by the title of bungalow in which Marie had secured a room, and the woman whom MacAllister interviewed was evidently the wife of a laborer. It was a poor place which the sunny climate alone made livable.

"Maria de la Guarda's at the studios," the woman told MacAllister.

"Have they given her work yet?" MacAllister asked quickly.

"Not till yesterday," the woman said. "She's been going out to the studios regular, though. Yesterday

they gave her a chance, and she said she expected to play to-day, too."

MacAllister inquired his way, then drove, as directed, up through winding canyons to the mimic city in the hills, the immense work-shop and show-place as well, of motion-picture production.

There they told him: "Maria de la Guarda? Yep. She's out on a location to-day."

"Where?" MacAllister asked.

"Sycamore Canyon—five miles up in the hills."

He asked whether he could go there in his automobile.

Oh, yes—but it was after four o'clock; the "bunch" would be on their way back before he got there. They'd be "turning in" by six o'clock.

Was Maria de la Guarda certain to return to the studios before going home?

"Sure thing."

MacAllister turned from the office with an hour of suspense on his hands. He spent it walking about the little city of stage properties, looking with interest at the long structures erected for the making of stage scenery and the housing of stage paraphernalia; at the series of open-air stages, or, rather, photographer's devices, divided by screens and roofed only by adjustable shades, in which pictures were being taken; at the rows of bathhouse-like dressing-rooms into which the players retired, or from which they emerged; at the various immovable bits of stage scenery standing stark and clear under the brazen sun, here the façade of an

Italian villa, there a Nuremberg street scene, a street of façades set up like a row of paper-dolls, and in the distance, backed against the hills, a medieval gateway bridging the mouth of a canyon.

Closely half-circled by dun-colored hills patched here and there by live-oaks, the motion-picture city itself was a many-acre-wide stage, across which hurried automobiles loaded with players being taken from one set of stages to another, and trucks carrying stage properties to various points. In and about the stages, making for this dressing-room or that, or strolling about in the open while waiting for their particular picture to be set up, were armored knights, modern soldiers, the sleuth and the tramp; the business man, the silk-hatted frock-coated gentleman, the Hindu, the Turk, and the white-gloved butler; ladies alluringly clad, the débutante, the houri, the washerwoman, the child of the slums, the baby in arms, the stage dog, and hardest working of all, the director and the attentive operator. It was an immense open-air stage backgrounded by hills and glared upon by the sun, and a busy work-shop that sent its wares to the farthest corners of the earth—even into heathendom.

So this was the life into which Marie had stepped; into which he had driven her! MacAllister was impressed by it all, for he realized the fascination that underlay all this unreal reality and garish activity—the vision of the play-actor that reaches beyond it all to that waiting audience of millions; that great eager audience expectant always of entertainment, and vastly

capable of appreciation. MacAllister realized what a spur it must be to talent, and what an allure to ambition. It was that vision made the play-actor's life possible; relieved monotony and ennui.

And Marie, this new Marie with whom he had been making acquaintance during the last two weeks, had recuperative force, and MacAllister knew that back of all recuperative force there is ambition. He was afraid of this new Marie as revealed to him through her letter to Clare. This was the same girl who had struggled against odds in Paris, only grown into a woman with a mantle of desolation drawn about her. She looked out upon life coolly. She was quite capable of judging him and finding him wanting.

MacAllister had traveled a long road since the day he had told Marie that she was "a stranger" to him, and that his love was dead. His anger had melted quickly in the hot furnace of regret and desire. He knew now that, when he had walked the streets of New York in search of her he was held by a blind craving for her; the simple primitive demand that would have taken her from Mendall, from any man, and, yellow or white, Indian or Scotchwoman, would have made her his own. It had been that—a blind unreasoning desire commingled with the fear that she had taken her own life, passed beyond his reach forever.

He had come back to Laclasse certain of it, and had been met by a relief that had been almost too much for him. He had not been deciding anything when he

sat crimson-faced before Freda; he had decided long ago; he meant to travel to Marie by the first train that would take him. But the Marie Freda had revealed to him had made him uneasy—more than uneasy. He had not doubted for a moment that the girl who had knelt to kiss his hand would come into his arms as soon as he opened them to her. But the woman who, when refused his love, had surmounted her difficulties and had chosen her future, had the same spirit that was revealed in Freda and so astonishingly in Mrs. Mendall; the new spirit in woman that MacAllister called "a bit of the superwoman." The spirit that turns so quickly to activity and independence for comfort—and finds it. Not only finds comfort, but an absorbing interest as well, and a certain critical and unimpulsive attitude toward marriage.

Unless Freda was right, unless the Indian woman was the stronger in Marie, the vision that takes hold on the play-actor might rule her. Freda had said, "The time will come when you will bless that golden streak of hers." MacAllister had come by degrees to count upon Marie's inheritance as his best friend.

LIX

"IF YE'LL ONLY HAVE IT SO"

BEFORE six o'clock MacAllister went to the gateway through which he had been told the returning automobile loads of players would "turn in." There was a live-oak near the gateway; MacAllister stood in its shade, waiting. Half a dozen automobiles came in while he waited, discharging their loads a short distance away, at one of the long rows of dressing-rooms.

A motley crew they were, men and women with their make-up still upon them, most of them dusty from a long ride, and all of them evidently intent on getting out of costume as soon as possible. The five automobile loads which composed Marie's party were the last to come in, a troop of stage Indians, squaws and cowboys. Some of the women had removed their make-up, but not their squaw garb.

MacAllister discovered Marie instantly. She sat on a front seat beside the director, a big Indian seated on the floor of the car at her feet. Her squaw dress was of the gaudiest, profusely beaded and fringed, and her two long braids of hair crossed her bosom and lay coiled in her lap. She had removed her make-up;

under the hood of the automobile she looked black-haired, creamy-skinned, wide-lidded, the Marie of MacAllister's recollection in a garb that became her even better than swathings of satin. MacAllister's heart leapt at sight of her, his ears drumming queerly.

The two foremost automobiles had not cleared yet, and this one stopped beneath the oak to discharge its load, within a few feet of MacAllister. The players scrambled out, surrounding him: Indian warriors carrying their feather head-dresses over their arms, and three squaws who sprang out of the tonneau unassisted.

But not Marie. The regal that MacAllister had so often marked in her was never more apparent than at this moment. She kept her seat until helped down by the director, standing quietly while the stir about her cleared, listening meantime to some directions of his, smiling a little at him, the slow lifting and lowering of her lashes that MacAllister remembered so well. How often he had seen her look in that way when she was "charming Laclasse!" She meant to succeed in this new environment, just as she had succeeded in Laclasse. And while she smiled faintly and listened gravely the sun worked the usual wonder, turned her hair golden. She was within reach of his arm, almost, and yet unconscious of his presence.

With the hot sense of being supplanted, MacAllister watched the attentions that Marie had already captured, the muscular cowboy and burly Indian who hung back, waiting for the director to release her, and

when she turned to follow the hurrying crowd of players, attached themselves to her, one on either side. As he watched her easy movements and saw the bent heads of the two men, MacAllister had the unendurable feeling that Marie was walking away, out of his life, and not alone.

The few strides that brought him within arms' length were involuntary, the haste of the man who grasps at something which is escaping. He touched her shoulder: "Marie—?"

She stopped under his voice and touch as if turned to stone, so sudden a pause that the two men went on for a pace or two before turning. They saw then what MacAllister could not see, the sudden wild lift of her brows and the quiver that crossed her face, leaving it like marble, the chiseled stillness of feature MacAllister saw when he faced her. It was her eyes only that moved.

"I've come for ye, Marie—I want ye."

MacAllister did not know why he spoke with the accustomed air of possession. It was purely involuntary; possibly because of the two men who were waiting; possibly merely habit.

Marie said nothing. She looked at him, that steady, unwinking, yellow gaze of hers, slowly shifted her gaze to his lips, to his throat, and his broad chest—a strange, consuming look. Then she stood with eyes lowered, without movement or answer.

"Will ye come, dear?" MacAllister asked.

"No, Monsieur," she said low but clearly.

It was going to be a struggle then, as he had feared. MacAllister squared his shoulders and looked about him, at the waiting men, at the players who hurried by them, seclusion nowhere—except on the hillside.

"We can't talk here," he said briefly. "Come over yonder with me—to the hill."

Marie turned without a glance at the two men and walked with him across the two or three hundred feet of level. MacAllister did not take his eyes from her, but Marie looked straight ahead. Neither of them said a word. When his hand touched her, offering help, she drew away, climbing more swiftly than he the incline that brought them beneath an oak, a shelter from those who might be looking. She stood, backed against its twisted trunk, facing him, an attitude suggestive of defense.

MacAllister had gained control of himself. He had cooled as he always did in a crisis. He realized that in those three weeks Marie had traveled as long a road as he had. He had studied her face keenly, noting the changes in her. This was an older and a graver woman who had lost all trace of girlish indecision, lips compressed, cheeks less rounded, brows thoughtful. And wrapping her from brow to feet was an atmosphere of *stillness*. He realized what it was Clare had meant when she said that Marie gave her the impression of "utter desolation."

She looked at him gravely, steadily, and without a word.

"Marie, I've come first of all to beg yer forgive-

He had the feeling that Marie was walking out of his life, and not alone

Digitized by Google

ness," MacAllister said simply, "and, next, to tell ye that I did not know my own heart when I said my love was dead. . . . Dear, ye're the world to me. I found that out when I thought ye were gone forever. I thought that in yer despair ye had gone with Carl Mendall, and I knew, if when out of yer mind ye had done such a thing, there was a greater despair in store for ye. I went to New York just so soon as Mrs. Mendall told me, and for a week I searched for ye with wretchedness in my heart. 'Twas then I knew I loved ye; that so long as I lived I'd love ye. . . . And when I found Mendall it was only to learn that ye had gone—I didn't know where. I came back to Laclasse with the certainty that I'd never see ye alive again. 'Twas Freda told me ye were safe—Clare had told her. Then I came here. . . . It's been three weeks of such misery as I've never known in my life, though once before I thought I'd touched bottom. . . . But it's ended, now, dear—if ye'll only have it so."

Marie's eyes had widened as she listened, her lips parting, to draw in his speech as it were. But at his conclusion they set again. She looked down at her moccasined feet. "You no longer fear the Indian, then? Or the deeds of my mother and my grandmother?" She touched her hair, her eyes and her cheek, looking at him again. "The tiger's coat does not frighten you, then, Monsieur?"

"No. I want ye as ye are. I'm afraid of nothing, Marie."

She was silent, immobile.

"I am not blaming ye for yer anger," MacAllister said.

"I am not angry. I have never been angry with you, and I never shall be."

"Is it pride that stands in the way, then, dear?"

"What am I, that I should be proud?" Marie answered too evenly for bitterness.

MacAllister studied her withdrawn, unapproachable air, realizing that she was neither angry nor bitter. It could be only the one thing.

He lost his flush. "Don't ye love me any longer?" he asked, grown suddenly husky. "That's the question I should have asked first thing. It's the only thing that matters between us now."

Marie shrank. "Do not make me hurt you, Monsieur—"

"Answer my question!" MacAllister said passionately. "Why do ye torture me? . . . Do ye love me, or do ye not?"

"I do not know!" Marie answered, her voice suddenly sharp and strained. "That is why I have been silent. I would rather die than hurt you—that I know. The moment I heard your voice I knew I must hurt you, and it was almost more than I could bear. . . . Monsieur, I do not know how to explain myself. Perhaps there is still in me the love that went on its knees to you. I do not know. But I think that in these weeks that woman has died from grief and longing, and the other thing has grown. I had it in me those

years when I danced in Paris and fought my way inch by inch—the woman who wished to belong to no one; who wished to climb by her own efforts to success. . . . Monsieur, it has been the Indian girl who has lain dying. I am more white than Indian. Perhaps there is in me a pride that would make of myself something more than the yellow cat that crawled starving and beseeching to your door. Perhaps I wish to give a child something in myself of which it may be proud —perhaps that is the urge I feel. I can not explain myself. I know only that should I go with you, it would be with shame in my heart." There were tears in her voice when she finished.

It was his fear realized. MacAllister assimilated it, gaged it, standing speechless until it grew into a large fact. "It's the allure of that place down there has laid hold on ye," he said bitterly.

Marie looked down at the show city, her brows drawn. "It has a future for me, Monsieur—if I work very hard, I think I may succeed—that is all I see in it. . . . And yet—that is not all," she added slowly. "I know that I have talent. To feel one's self a power to hold a multitude—there is fascination in that. . . . You wished the power of money—I am of your blood."

It was like having his own weapon turned upon him by a hand stronger than his own. But there was plenty of will in MacAllister for the struggle. "Come back with me, back to Laclasse, and give the love, that I can't believe is dead, a chance. Do that for me,

Marie? . . . If ye find then it is gone completely, ye shall have my help to become whatever ye wish. I give ye my word of honor."

Marie stumbled over the hard refusal. "Monsieur —I believe you would—but. . . . Oh, Monsieur, I *can not!* What I do I must do quite by myself! . . . No, I will not," she added with greater firmness.

"I'll not give ye up, and I'll not leave ye here alone!" MacAllister declared more hotly. "I'll stay here—on yer very door-step!"

Marie's eyes narrowed, the look Carl Mendall knew well. "I think not, Monsieur. I would go in a night —as I did from Laclasse."

"Will ye tell me what it is ye'd have me do, then?" MacAllister asked bitingly.

Marie met his demand with one of her sudden changes to gentleness. "Go back to your home, Monsieur—and leave me to myself. I wish to be alone."

"To turn yer heart to some boy like that bedizened fool that sat at yer feet down there!"

The tears gathered in her eyes. "I know the honesty of my purpose—I do not deserve that."

MacAllister's look changed. "Oh, Marie, child— it's just that I want ye so! It's like having food and water set just beyond my reach—when I'm famished for them both. I can't bear to endure what my own anger has brought on me. I've almost killed the love ye offered me in such full measure. I know that, and that it's like never to return to me. It seems I've simply got to wait yer own time—though God knows

how!" He put his hands on her shoulders, the familiar caress. "If ye tell me to go, I'll go."

He felt her tremble under his hands, and the sign of wavering and the touch of her were too much. He caught her to him, and as passion gripped him and with it the determination to conquer, he kissed her, as on the night of their engagement, his strength against her struggle to escape—until she was still.

"Ye'll come now—" he said, at last, when he was spent and breathless. He could not believe that the passion that had conquered her once before would not conquer her again.

"No," she said.

"Ye love me still—I *know* it."

"I have told you all that is in my heart. I shall not come with you."

MacAllister held her off and looked at her, tear-stained and rumpled, her lips red from his kiss, a spot of carmine in each cheek. But her eyes under her drawn brows were indomitable.

He looked at her long and steadily, the flush fading from his face. "Ye're actually telling me to leave ye —and go down there . . . back to my empty house in Laclasse?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

MacAllister let her go so abruptly that she staggered, and, turning his back on her, looked down at his rival, the show city. It had tempted the woman who considers and weighs chances, the Scotch blood in her. . . . He was trying to think how he might

keep a little hold; how appeal to the loving girl she had once shown herself. . . . He would come again—come frequently—until she yielded. . . . But if the Indian in her, the girl Freda said he had captured, was dead. . . .

He turned around with a plea on his lips, and was met by all the confutation there can be in outward seeming. Marie had dropped to the ground and sat with knees embraced, her hair in strands across her brow, her chin heavy, her cheek-bones brought into relief; a squaw, sad-eyed, immobile, the broodingly patient look of the primitive woman, the animal-mother look.

The impression MacAllister received was so powerful that it silenced his plea. He stared at her. "I believe—at heart—ye're simply the Indian ye look this minute," he said slowly. "The woman I've been struggling with this last hour is naught but my double. Freda's right: 'twas the inheritance yer mother gave ye, I captured, and it's that will bring ye back to me—if it's the strongest in ye. . . . I'll not trouble ye—I'll just leave ye to find yer own heart. I can wait." And without further farewell, he turned and went down the hill.

Marie watched him go; lifted to her knees that she might see better, head craned, eyes narrowed and intent, motionless—until his automobile had carried him out of sight. Then she dropped forward and lay with her face against her folded arms, quite still—until the dusk came.

LX

JUST ALL WOMAN

IT was April of the following year, a mildly tearful night except when stirred by gusts of heavy weeping, sweet with the scent of fresh earth and young grass and swelling buds. The prairie state was again shyly donning its underslip of pale green, now smiling at thought of fruitful summer, now weeping over the frozen winter, now warm, now chill, like a youthful woman who is laying aside her widow's weeds.

MacAllister had come in from the chill to sit beside his library fire. He was listening now to the patter of the rain on the tiling of the porch—as on the night, a year ago, when the door of his house and the door of his heart had opened to Marie. Only it was an added year of experience that sat with him now and not Frederick Bagsby. And it was the Chinaman and not Townley who came and went softly, who drew the shades and lowered the lights preparatory to the night, who shuffled about lightly with a slanting glance always for the gloomy man beside the fire.

MacAllister neither heard nor saw him. His pipe had lost all but the warmth the hollow of his hand gave it, for he had forgotten it also. He was thinking

of the past nine months, the unsatisfactory background to the helpless, desperate resolve he had brought in with him out of the wet and chill.

They had brought the fulness of life to all who were nearest to him in interest: to Margaret Mendall a son who clung to her breast with warm lips, an eager, healthy, demanding morsel, with small fists already opening and closing on life, beating the air in eagerness for the strife, and also the breast from which he drew strength—a man of the future; to Carl Mendall the winter had brought a measure of success—he was winning recognition; to Clare Bagsby the husband of her choice and already the first hope of motherhood; to Freda O'Rourke—devoted friend and determinedly cheerful predictor of his future—days so full of work and interest that in her presence depression covered its face in shame; and to Marie, the woman whom he loved, the promise, certainly, of a successful career.

In a money way, MacAllister had prospered during those nine months. Though he had not made the many additional thousands a munition plant would have brought him, the returns from his Iron Works had satisfied him. He had kept his promise to Marie, and Marie meant more to him than anything else. As he said to Bagsby, "There's something I want a deal more than I want money, Fred, and that's the girl out there in California who's bent on going her own way. . . . If ever this country needs ammunition, which I hope it'll not, my buildings are there—I can make a munition plant of them at short notice. I rebuilt with

that in mind. I'm for this 'preparedness' movement —if I'm needed, I'll be ready."

His attitude toward the conspirators who had wrecked his plant was patiently implacable. He held in his hands the proof of Mortola's guilt and of Townley's complicity, and he had also ferreted out the group of Austrian laborers who had given them assistance. Mortola was held on a charge that MacAllister intended should imprison him for a long term of years. The federal authorities had hunted Townley down, and, as it seemed likely that he would turn evidence and furnish the government with valuable information, he was carefully guarded. In fact, the whole matter had come under federal jurisdiction, and MacAllister was awaiting the outcome, together with others who had suffered as he had. MacAllister had the satisfaction of knowing that, whatever the findings of the federal authorities might be, Mortola could not escape him. And between Andrew Kraup and himself it was "silence for silence," as Kraup had said; Kraup's name had not been brought into the matter, and Marie's history had not been aired. In fact, their battle had served to establish a more friendly feeling. In spite of their business rivalry they met without rancor, with even a dryly humorous appreciation of each other.

The truth was that MacAllister took little interest in any one but Marie, and had little thought of anything but the winning of Marie. And the nine months of endeavor had brought him only a steadily declining

hope. He was living with the conviction that Marie was moving farther and farther away from him. The Indian play in which she had had only a small part had visited Laclasse and passed on into the smaller towns. Another play in which she had a secondary part had also been shown. Throughout the autumn she had been regularly employed, her letters to Clare had told him that. And to-night MacAllister had come from an hour and a half's view of Maria de la Guarda, not a motion-picture star as yet—she still played a secondary part—but so certainly destined to be one that the hope to which he had clung died. He had come back to his house depressed to the point of desperation.

MacAllister had held to his purpose until Christmas time—he had left Marie alone to discover herself. Then endurance broke, and he had written out his heart to her, all its longing, its unalterable desire, its worship, page upon page of it. And her answer had come in time, elusive of the love his burning pen had tried to fasten upon her, quick with interest for all that concerned him, a perfectly frank expression of friendly interest that was as free as air in its independence.

But he had not been daunted. He had continued to write, a diary of his thoughts filled out and quickened by love. Being no self-analyst, MacAllister had not realized the extent of his self-revelation, of what his letters had carried to Marie. He did not know that he had stolen from Freda's portion and given to Marie

a friendship glorified by the passion that peoples the universe.

But Freda knew. "It's as it should be with him," she told Mrs. Mendall, to whom she confided most of her thoughts. "Alex and I will always be friends, but my day is really past. I suppose Alex is right when he says that the maternal is the biggest part of me. I suppose, really, that what I have been doing these last six years is mothering Alex. It's a good thing for me that the world is full of creatures that need mothering—I know I can't keep my hands off that baby of yours, Margaret. You'll have to give me a half interest in him or I'll be adopting a baby of my own." She spoke half sadly, half humorously. Strangely enough, the two women, though so unlike, had become fast friends. They took genuine pleasure in each other.

"I've often told you that my baby was half yours," Mrs. Mendall had answered earnestly. "Where would we either of us be but for you? Carl doesn't really want us—there isn't a bit of the paternal in him—and if ever anything happens to me I want my baby left to your care. I have often told you that."

"Very well," Freda said, "we'll rear him together. I guess that's a good enough future for me. . . . I believe that, in time, Marie will justify my faith in her, but I confess that at present it looks rather hopeless. She is showing herself more ambitious and more determined that I thought she could be. And she has real talent for what she is doing. She has more Span-

ish and more Scotch blood in her than I thought she had." Freda had been impressed by Marie's acting. The girl was certain to win her way, and Freda knew how tremendous a hold success may have upon a woman. How often she herself had longed for talent enough to walk out into the world and succeed!

MacAllister was hopeless enough over the situation. He wanted Marie, and she appeared to be moving steadily and victoriously away from him. She answered his letters, wrote of her almost overwhelming difficulties and her growing triumphs and her settled determination to succeed, but of love not a word. Her letters were at times facile, at others brief, Latin sometimes in their volubility, sometimes Indian in their taciturnity, just the thinking, not the feeling woman. And he was giving her everything, every thought and desire, every atom of himself. It was cruel.

That night MacAllister had seen Marie brought so close to him by the science of photo-play that he had looked directly into those strange animal eyes of hers. Then he had watched her in the arms of another, playing superbly the loved and then the forsaken girl. Seen her then become an adventuress who coolly used the passions of men, and had watched the "star," the "good woman" of the play, triumph over her.

"It's just a play," he told himself, while burning over it. "It's naught but a play."

But the thing had hurt savagely. And he was so helpless. He had come away despairing to the point of desperation. Freda's wisdom had counseled him to

wait, but that was beyond him. In the morning he meant to go to Marie for a last appeal. He had no hope; it would be time wasted; but sit still and wait he could not!

That was the resolve over which MacAllister was brooding, with lips tight set and eyes on the fire, oblivious of the Chinaman's light movements and sidelong glances, conscious only of the gusty weeping without which had now settled into a steady deluge of tears.

It was the opening of the front door, the Chinaman's last move, that reminded MacAllister of the man's presence and that it was growing late. He looked up with the photo-play vision of Marie still in his eyes, looked through dimly lighted space into the hall—at the queer ducking figure of the Chinaman and beyond it at a form that was gradually emerging from the shadows like a film-vision, a figure darkly cloaked and with a vague blot slowly molding into features: cheeks white, lips full, eyes wide apart and fixed upon his . . . Marie!

MacAllister rose stiffly, grasped at the table, and bending forward stared at the vision. She came forward a little, emerged somewhat more, gaining reality, but not until her voice, soft and thick, cut across his bemused senses did MacAllister grasp the actuality.

"Monsieur—?"

Many times in the last months MacAllister had watched Marie's lips frame voiceless words and seen gestures and movements that were wrapped in the

weird stillness that emphasized unbridgable space. But that soft warm cadence!

"Marie—? . . . *Marie!*"

The hands he took were cold and wet and trembling, as on that first night, and perhaps because of the odd reversion to a scene once enacted to which in intense excitement the brain is subject, Marie's answer was the same as on that first night: "Monsieur, I come to you through the rain—"

And as in the height of joy or in the depths of grief our speech is frequently prosaic, MacAllister said, "Ye'll just come in to the fire, Marie."

But, after all, it is inflection that gives meaning to words, and touch that vivifies love, and reverence that hallows it. MacAllister clung to her cold hands like one drowning, held them to his breast and then to his lips.

"Ye'll come in—ye'll just come in and get warm," he repeated breathlessly.

And with swift instinct the Chinaman knew his part. He shuffled off, cast a log and an armful of tinder on the smoldering fire, and fled.

It blazed high as MacAllister led her in, and with the same spell of bewilderment upon him rid her of her wet cloak and dripping hat, revealing her swathed in black but with a knot of scarlet at her breast and wearing her heavy crown of gold, dry and warm to his touch.

"Eh, it's not so bad—ye're not wet through," he said, not knowing as yet what he said.

"I came only from the car, Monsieur." She was constrained still, and uncertain, still a little like the stray that had ventured to his door the year before.

"It'll be yer little feet then that are wet."

MacAllister put her on the couch and, kneeling, took off her shoes, struggling over the buttons with unsteady fingers, murmuring something when he found her stockings dry. Marie looked down on his broad shoulders and powerful neck bent to her service, and the look of uncertainty left her face. The color crept into her cheeks and her eyes began to shine.

But her feet were cold like her hands, and MacAllister held them to warm them, bent then to kiss them, and suddenly the spell of awe and bewilderment that held him broke. He lifted, his head upflung, and when the light in his eyes met fairly the glow in hers his arms took her, drew her to his knees, held her bound.

"Ye've come to me like ye came in the beginning! Tell me what brought ye? Tell me quick! Before I kiss ye—before I go clean mad . . . Marie—?"

She quivered into passion. "It was your letters—they made me love you a thousand times more! It was that—and the contract. They wished me to sign for two years. I would be a leading lady—I would have much money—I would be a little more your equal—I could prove then that my tiger's coat covered a woman with will and brains and talent, that I was not just a starving yellow cat. I meant always to come to you, but I wished first to accomplish. But

for two long years! Hold myself away from you for two long years! I could not do it, Monsieur. *I could not!* And suddenly I came to you. And when I began to come I could not stop. The station and the rain, Monsieur! It was so like what it was before! I could not wait till morning—I wished only just you—"

His lips on hers stopped her speech, took her breath and clung to her, and then her arms circled him. It was the same still ecstasy that had held them in the beginning, only deepened and heightened by a completer understanding. . . . And afterward, when the fire had dropped low and she sat with head against his breast, MacAllister asked again for the assurance love is never weary of hearing:

"Tell me now what is in yer heart, Marie?"

"Just love," she said. "It has always been love that was in my heart, and never more so than in these months when I wished to be more worthy. I am just only that loving Indian girl that has belonged to you always, Monsieur."

He kissed her hair. "Yes, just all woman, and crowned with gold!" he said deeply. "We'll travel together bravely, we two made one—through rain or sunshine, to the very end."

THE END

RETURN TO ⟶ **CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT**
202 Main Library

LOAN PERIOD 1 **HOME USE**	2	3
4	5	6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS
1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405
6-month loans may be recharged by bringing books to Circulation Desk
Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

UCLA
INTERLIBRARY LOAN

REC. CIR. OCT 20 '78

MAY 07 1997

JUL 0 [illegible]

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
FORM NO. DD6, 40m, 3/78 BERKELEY, CA 94720

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C057109323

M18196

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

CAPWELL'S
Books, Kodaks
Stationery, Cards
Clay St., Oakland, Calif.